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THE OLD VICARAGE.

A NOVEL.

BY MRS. HUBBACK,

AUTHORESS OF

“THE WIFE’S SISTER,” “MAY AND DECEMBER,”
&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE OLD VICARAGE.

CHAPTER I.

“What! thou think’st men speak in courtly chambers,
Words by which the wretched are consoled?
What! thou think’st this aching brow was cooler,
Circled, Tristram, by a crown of gold?”

ISEULT.

THE cry of alarm had brought Charles Huyton also to the spot where the accident had happened; for one brief moment the rivals stood side by side, and gazed upon the scene. Under the steep, shelving bank, nearly submerged in the water, but clinging with her left arm to a long, pendant root, hung Hilary, and with her

right hand she grasped, with all the energy of terrified love, the skirt of her sister's dress, thereby but little supporting the child, and risking herself to be drawn from her precarious hold, and plunged in deep water by her struggles.

Captain Hepburn and Charles Huyton simultaneously flung off their coats.

"Save Hilary—I will secure the child," said the sailor, in a tone of decision which seemed to command obedience, and without an instant of unnecessary delay, sprang from the steep bank head-foremost into the water. Mr. Huyton followed his example, and almost before she was conscious of help being at hand, Hilary felt an arm supporting her, and heard a well-known voice saying—

"Trust to me, dearest, and you will be safe."

She was too exhausted to understand exactly what was passing. She felt her sister was raised, released her grasp on her dress, and had just sense and energy enough left to remain quite

passive, as she was borne to a more practicable part of the bank. She turned her head, saw Nest was safe in Captain Hepburn's care—his strong arms had drawn the child quickly out of danger—and then, perfectly overpowered, she fainted away. Landing her was by no means an easy task, the ground was soft, crumbling, and treacherous; but for the ready help at hand, Charles could not have done it; and he was so much exhausted by his efforts, that when he was assisted from the water, he was not only unable to support his burden, but had himself to sit down on the grass, to rest and breathe.

Captain Hepburn hastily placed the dripping child in some of the many arms stretched out to take her, and turned with an eager bound to Hilary, who seemed as lifeless as her sister. But Maurice reached her at the same time; he had seen the accident, and with rapid strokes had brought the boat to the nearest land, where, utterly forgetful even of Dora Barham, he had thrown the chain by which the skiff was moored

into the boatman's hands, and sprung ashore to assist Hilary.

He clasped his sister in his arms, exclaiming, as he did so, "Darling, dearest Hilary!" in the tones of the fondest endearment; then added, with agonized doubt,

"Oh, Hepburn, is she dead?"

Her pale cheeks, closed eyes, and inanimate form terrified him, and he looked to his friend for advice, assistance, or at least for comfort.

"Heaven forbid!" cried the other, eagerly catching her hand, and endeavouring to feel her pulse, "she has only fainted from alarm. She must be taken to the house."

"Carry your sister to the house this moment," cried Victoria; "I have despatched little Nest there already, and will send some one to make preparations, and give orders."

A gentleman present, a relative of the Barhams, offered to run on and carry a message, but Sybil sprang forward—

“Let me go, Miss Fielding, give me the necessary directions.”

Victoria gave a hasty message to the house-keeper, and Sybil was off with a fleetness, and a knowledge of the shortest road, which distanced Mr. Farrington completely.

Some of the many shawls which were proffered for the use of the sufferers, were hastily wrapped round Hilary, and, raising her in his arms, her brother walked off with steady steps towards the house.

Charles and Captain Hepburn accompanied him, each entirely occupied by thoughts of her, and neither at that moment caring to conceal it.

Either the fresh air, the warmth, or the motion, revived Hilary; she sighed, opened her eyes, looked up for a moment, in doubt where she was, and what had happened, then recollecting everything, she started up, and cried—

“Nest—oh, Maurice, is she safe?”

“Be still, darling,” replied he, and it was

echoed by the other two ; but she only repeated the question in greater alarm.

“ Yes, yes, she is safe ; she is just on in front. Some one is carrying her to the house. Hepburn saved her.”

The look which Hilary gave the sailor at that moment, was one which he never forgot.

“ I could walk, Maurice, I could walk quicker, if you would set me down,” said she, eagerly.

“ I am quite well, do let me try.”

“ Patience, we are just there !” and he would not let her go, until they reached the door.

Several female attendants, and Sybil herself, were waiting there ; they were carrying the little one up to be placed in Victoria’s own bed ; and, a moment after, Miss Fielding herself joined them, having hurried on to summon a physician, who, as Isabel reminded her, was happily one of the party. Dr. Pilgrim was found, and at once took the lead in ordering and advising ; gave the necessary directions for restoring animation to Nest, who still continued insensible, sent

Victoria instantly to superintend the proper precautions for Hilary's safety, and insisted on both the gentlemen retiring to procure dry clothes, declaring that they could do no good to any one, until they had first taken care of themselves.

Happily, by the time Hilary was allowed by her active and judicious attendants to be well enough to seek her sister, Nest was not only perfectly restored to consciousness, but had dropped off into a quiet sleep, and Miss Duncan, at her own urgent request, was permitted to watch by her, on condition, as Dr. Pilgrim insisted, that nothing should be allowed to disturb the little one's slumber, on which he declared her entire recovery to depend. By this means, as he communicated to Mrs. Gainsborough, the housekeeper, they should compel Miss Duncan to keep quiet also, and he was really more alarmed on her account than her sister's, if the evident excitement under which she was labouring was not checked by some decisive measures. She ought to have gone to bed also.

In the darkened room, reclining on an easy chair, beside the bed where the child peacefully slept, Hilary passed the rest of the afternoon, putting up mental thanksgivings for the safety of her darling, and for the preservation of her own life; grateful for the kindness and care she met with, and more grateful still that *he*, the one to whom her heart had turned for help in the moment of horror and alarm, had been near enough to hear her cry, and rescue her sister.

She was hardly aware who had saved herself; the absorbing idea of Nest's danger and Nest's safety, had prevented her making other inquiries, and her head still felt too weak and confused to think with accuracy, or recollect with precision. It all seemed a cloud of fear and agony, from the time when she saw her sister was running into danger, by so rapidly descending the steep bank, and when, in her effort to arrest her, she too had lost her footing on the short, slippery turf, and crumbling, sandy edge, until she had once

more recovered herself in her brother's arms, and had heard the delicious assurance that Nest was safe.

At intervals, Sybil or Gwyneth would softly creep into the room, kiss her, look at Nest, till the tears sprung, and then glide away without a word; or Victoria would come with some refreshment, which she urged on Hilary with whispered eagerness; or Dr. Pilgrim would steal in with a stealthy, noiseless tread, glance at the child, feel Hilary's pulse, and in low, positive tones, renew his orders for perfect quiet and repose.

The watchful housekeeper, too, was frequent in her silent visits, and the German maid, who sat in her mistress's dressing-room, knowing no tongue saving her own, was deaf to entreaties for admission from all others, according to the express injunctions of Fraulein Victoria.

Meanwhile, beyond that silent room, away even from sight as well as hearing of its inmates, all was excitement, bustle, interest, and

gossip. Seeing that the accident had not been attended by fatal consequences, and that after the first lively alarm, there was nothing which need disturb the festal party, the visitors listened to the earnest entreaties of Miss Fielding, and remained as if nothing had happened. Of course there was much to be said about this interesting circumstance ; all who had seen it had to tell their own story, each version differing considerably from the other ; all who had not enjoyed the advantage of being spectators, were naturally eager to acquire the needful information ; and every lady there was loud in praise of the heroism of Mr. Huyton, in saving Hilary at the risk of his own life.

It was remarkable how much was said of him, how enthusiastic were the encomiums bestowed on his courage and presence of mind, whilst the equal devotion of his companion was passed over in silence. Every one could tell that Mr. Huyton, without a moment's hesitation, had sprung from the bank to rescue the

sufferers; none but himself and one other seemed aware, that he was second in the attempt, and that it was the prompt decision of another mind which had influenced his conduct. Charles was brave, perhaps; but the total disregard of danger, the self-devotion which could calmly risk death itself in the cause of humanity, the quiet trust in a higher power which true christianity alone can give, these were not his. Neither had he the quick eye to see the best means of help, the rapid decision to carry it out, nor the unselfish prudence which could resign the efforts love would have prompted, rather than fail of doing all that was required; to these he had no claim. No human eye could see that jealousy and rivalry had prompted what others call heroism and self-devotion; that but for the example of another, he would have shrunk from the attempt; or that had not his companion been more generous than himself, they might have clashed in their efforts to rescue

Hilary, whilst Nest might have been lost by delay.

When Mr. Huyton returned to his guests, having changed his own clothes, and taken care that Captain Hepburn was properly accommodated, he was received as a hero. Every one crowded round him, to congratulate and admire; one enthusiastic lady (she had two grown-up daughters) insisted on his being crowned with laurel; and the professional singer, Madame G——, came forward, and volunteered a grand *bravura* in his honour. In short, such was the crowd about him, that Maurice could hardly pierce through, to shake his hands in both of his, and thank him, with grateful emotion, for the safety of his sister. Charles bore it very well; he put aside the plaudits, escaped from the ovation, gracefully denied all merit, and seizing Maurice by the arm, eagerly drew him aside to pour out his rapturous delight at having been of use to Hilary. No one was near, for he had retreated quite away from his guests;

and they had the consideration not to intrude on the gratitude and thanks of the brother, whatever they might have wished to do. In this moment of feeling and excitement, Maurice learnt with surprise, what Hilary had hitherto carefully concealed even from him—the ardent, constant, unchanging devotion of his friend for his sister. Charles gave vent to his feelings, told of his love, his disappointment, his hopes, his fears ; Hilary was dearer to him than ever, dearer far than life ; (he really thought so, now there was no danger ;) had he any chance, could Maurice give him any encouragement ; at least, would he give him his good wishes ?

Surprise was the brother's principal feeling ; not surprise that Hilary was loved, but that he had never discovered what was passing close to him. As to his sister's feelings, could he have guessed them, he would not have betrayed his guesses, nor breathed a word which could make her blush. He was saved from further solicit-

ation by a summons to Charles, who was wanted by his cousin immediately.

Maurice at that moment was in no humour for making love himself—his thoughts were absorbed by his sisters' peril, and their escape ; the crowd was irksome to him ; his feelings wanted a higher and better outlet than the idle gossip and careless chatter around : he could not hear the subject lightly discussed, with even outward calmness ; and now, reassured by a recent report from Dr. Pilgrim, that both patients were doing as well as possible, he quietly strolled away into the shrubbery, and then retraced, with thoughtful step and swelling heart, the path along which he had borne his sister's inanimate form.

He reached the spot where the accident had occurred, he saw the marks on the bank, he gazed at the dark, still, sullen-looking water, whose black depth had so nearly been the grave of those two loved ones ; and lifting his hat from his head, he raised his whole heart in

grateful praise, that she, the light, the support, the comfort of their home, and that little one, whose merry voice always spoke of mirth and love, had been spared to bless them still.

He was roused by a footstep ; his hands were grasped by Captain Hepburn ; and warm, earnest, deeply heartfelt congratulations were poured out to him on his sister's safety.

"My dear fellow ! I cannot speak my joy—they say she is doing well ! have you seen her yet ?" continued he, eagerly.

Maurice answered he had not.

"They insist on perfect quiet at present, and then, Dr. Pilgrim says, all will be well ; but, Hepburn, how can I thank *you* enough, for this additional benefit ; dearer, more precious far than my own life ? I wish I could speak—"

Maurice could not quite control his voice, and was obliged to break off abruptly.

"I did not save Hilary," replied he ; "thank Mr. Huyton for that !"

"You did what I am certain Hilary will

thank you for more than for her own life—you saved Nest ; and I think she will feel as I do ; although she may not have so entire an appreciation of your motives as I have.”

“ My motives were simple enough,” said Captain Hepburn, after a little pause ; “ I felt I might trust her to the exertions of Mr. Huyton, at least, till I had placed the child in safety ; and Nest’s struggles made it difficult to do anything for either, whilst Hilary retained her grasp on her clothes.”

“ I knew it ! I was convinced that it was your doing—your judgment, decision, prudence, and promptness, by which either was rescued ! Others may give Huyton the credit—they are making a hero of him out there—but *I* know, and Hilary, too, shall know, to whom we are truly indebted. What can I say ! how poor words are ! what can I do to show our gratitude ?”

“ Nothing—nothing more, my dear fellow ! it was nothing to speak of, although the result

was so important. If Hilary will only believe that I acted as I thought *she* would wish,—that for her dear sake I did what I did,—would have done anything possible—would have dared a thousand times more had it been necessary, then I shall be amply repaid !”

Maurice looked at him earnestly and inquiringly. Captain Hepburn went on after a moment.

“ I should have acted as I did, Maurice, even though I had known that in resigning the charge of her to Mr. Huyton, I was resigning all claim on her for ever. Her safety was more to me than my life, as her happiness is more important than my own. May be, she may never know this ; be it so ! if she is happy, I will try to be content.”

“ I hardly understand you,” replied Maurice, “ at least, I am not sure ; but if your wishes are what I suppose, I can only say that mine will go with them ; more, infinitely more cordially than with Charles Huyton.”

“I did not mean to have said so much,” replied Captain Hepburn; “it was a momentary excitement; we will not discuss it now. I want to know about going back to the Vicarage. Hilary and Nest must remain here, and will require something in the way of wardrobe, certainly; and you must remember, the little one was to have returned about seven, and one of her sisters with her. I think these were the first arrangements. Your father will be expecting them, and the Paines will wish to go home.”

“True, what is to be done? Hilary *must* remain here, of course.”

“I could go home with your sister Gwyneth, if you like; perhaps you would wish to remain as late as possible, to hear the last account; and probably Miss Sybil had better, if she can, stay with her sisters altogether. What do you think?”

“That you have the clearest head for arranging in the world.”

“ Well, you may propose it, I can only suggest privately to you, and have no wish to put myself forward. If they will send us home, I shall be ready whenever Gwyneth likes, and the carriage can take back the clothes.”

They turned to walk towards the house, Maurice anxious to find his sisters, and settle with them what they would wish to have done.

It was soon arranged, and just as Captain Hepburn had suggested. The invitation to the younger Miss Duncans to remain with their sisters, had already been given, through the thoughtful kindness of Charles, and although it was impossible both should accept it, it was gratefully taken advantage of by Sybil, who shrank from the idea of being the one to break the intelligence to Mr. Duncan, and gladly persuaded herself that she could be more use at ‘the Ferns’ to Hilary herself, whilst Gwyneth would certainly be much the best able to act for her father alone.

The carriage was ordered immediately, and

Gwyneth stealing up-stairs to take one more look at the invalids, found Hilary had just been positively ordered by Dr. Pilgrim to go to bed, where he hoped a composing draught would procure necessary sleep, and avert the symptoms of fever which he reluctantly admitted were becoming stronger.

Gwyneth, however, was not informed of this alarm; she stayed to see Hilary comfortably settled for the night, and as her heavy eyelids closed almost as soon as her head touched the pillow, it was hoped by all her nurses that a good night's rest would cure everything that was wrong. Sybil wished to remain with her, but there was really nothing to be done, and both patients appearing to be quietly asleep, Victoria persuaded her to trust them to the watchfulness of Mrs. Gainsborough, and return with her to the company for the present; and her entreaties being enforced by a threat, that if she did not come down, Miss Fielding would remain with

her upstairs, Sybil was obliged, though somewhat reluctantly, to yield the point.

As they were issuing from the house, they met Mr. Farrington strolling about near the door; he joined them immediately, and after inquiring earnestly for the sufferers upstairs, he turned to Sybil, and expressed, in very gentlemanlike and pleasant words, his strong admiration of her promptness in action and swiftness of foot.

Sybil, of course, like a great many other people when undergoing a compliment, or accused of a virtue, took refuge in denying the facts, declaring herself peculiarly slow in action, and undecided in thought, and hardly even allowing that she could run faster than other people; although, to say the truth, her forest-life, and habits independent of governess and dancing-master, had given, or at least had not taken away, a power and ease of motion not common to many young ladies.

Mr. Farrington did not persist in compliments

which were evidently received with as much shy reluctance as conscious pleasure ; but changing the conversation, first discussed with her the details of the accident, listening with extreme interest to Sybil's enthusiastic gratitude to Captain Hepburn and Mr. Huyton, and then led her on, how she hardly knew, to give a long detail of their usual mode of life ; their quiet habits, their father's state of health ; followed by glowing descriptions of the lovely forest scenery, through which they were wont to roam, the quaint manners of the woodmen, the vagrant ways of the gypsies, and a hundred other particulars, which Sybil detailed with a poetic feeling for the romance of their situation peculiarly attractive to him.

Her ardent affection and admiration for her half-sister, convinced Mr. Farrington that Sybil herself must be equally amiable, and perhaps equally clever to appreciate her so entirely ; and altogether he was so much interested in his com-

panion, as to feel disinclined to quit her again during the rest of the evening.

Sybil was too tired, from excitement and exertion, to be disposed to do anything but sit still beside Mrs. Fielding, except at the intervals when she stole upstairs to learn how Hilary slept; and her spirits being naturally depressed by what had already passed, and anxiety for the future, she was just in that state of mind which made her communicative of her hopes and fears, inclined to take retrospective views of bygone happiness, and thankful to hear cheerful anticipations for the morrow.

As to Maurice, after he had made the arrangements before recorded, feeling easier for his sisters at 'the Ferns,' and depending entirely on his friend's discretion to give as little pain as possible to his father in making known the accident, he suddenly returned to thoughts of his own affairs, that is to say, to recollections of Dora, whom he had left with her sister, and

wonder what they had done, as well as what they would think of his conduct.

Isabel he saw was with her aunt, Lady Margaret, and her party, which was tolerably numerous, but Dora herself was invisible. He went up to Miss Barham, and apologised for his conduct, in quitting them so abruptly in the boat ; an apology which she declared totally unnecessary, as of course Hilary must be his first object ; but in answer to his inquiries after her sister, she could only tell him, that Dora had gone in-doors to rest, as she said she had a head-ache, and the band made it worse. As soon as he could, Maurice went to the house to look for her, but was unsuccessful in his search through all the public-rooms. Vexed and disappointed, he strolled out again, but on the opposite side to that on which the pavilion stood, and wandered away by himself, into a small thicket of laurel and other evergreens, overhung by some remarkably fine old hawthorns, whose long sprays

wreathed with snowy blossoms, shed around their rich and enervating perfume.

A sudden turn in the walk brought him to a small alcove, and there, reclining on a bank of turf, her face concealed partly by her arm and partly by her handkerchief, was Dora Barham, sobbing as if her heart were broken, and so engrossed by the cause of her agitation, as to be quite unconscious of his approach.

He hesitated a moment, for he could not leave her in such grief, and yet he did not dare to intrude upon it; he stopped, looked at her, waited, and was then resolved to go back, when accidentally treading on a broken stick in the path, the sharp crack it gave under his foot, startled Dora, and made her instantly raise her head.

“Mr. Duncan!” exclaimed she, trying to brush away her tears in a great hurry, as she saw him, but not looking at all sorry at the interruption.

“I hope I do not disturb you,” said he, apolo-

getically. "I had no idea of finding you here."

"Not in the least," looking at the bank beside her (she was now sitting upright), as if she longed to ask him to sit down. "How is Hilary?"

"Doing quite well, they tell me; she is going to bed; I hope she will sleep well, and be all right to-morrow." He ventured to sit down as he spoke.

"Oh, I am so glad! dear Hilary—it was horrid, dreadful—I cannot get the idea out of my head; oh, Mr. Duncan! if they had not been there to save her!" Dora shuddered again, and again tears filled her eyes and rolled down her cheeks.

"Do not agitate yourself so," exclaimed her companion, "do not think of it; can I do nothing for you; get you nothing?"

"No, thank you! I shall be better presently." She sobbed a little, and then was quiet.

“And your head-ache? Miss Barham told me it was bad.”

“I believe it was my heart, more than my head, Mr. Duncan,” replied Dora, with a smile.

“I cannot bear things as Isabel does, and I was so frightened; and people seemed so thoughtless and indifferent, and so ready to forget—so little thankful. Oh, dear! what a set I live with; it made my heart full, and my head ache; so at last I crept away here, to be happy and grateful my own way.”

He looked at her with a smile, half-admiring, half arch, but said,—

“I had no idea I found you in a state of *happiness*.”

She crimsoned, laughed, and then said,—

“It is, nevertheless, very pleasant to cry sometimes.”

“I have heard so before,” was his answer.

“And one cannot do it in company, you know; it would look absurd, and be considered bad manners, which is worse; and besides, peo-

ple do not ever understand one ; I believe *you* are rather shocked at me."

"Do you ? then I am afraid my looks are deceitful."

"Don't you think me foolish then ?" colouring again, and looking down.

"Foolish for feeling for my sister's danger ! foolish for caring for her safety ! if affection, sympathy, friendship, sensibility, gratitude to Heaven, sincerity, simple truth of feeling, if these are folly, or if you can suppose I consider them so, then accuse me of thinking you foolish."

She was silent, but was visibly gratified by his warmth of manner.

"What have I ever done or said, Miss Barham, which can justify your suspecting me of such hard-hearted, cynical want of feeling ? Tears, which do honour to my sister's worth ; tears, which prove your disinterested regard for the dearest objects of my heart ; tears, which show how nearly we sympathise in some of *our* feelings and affections ; if I do not honour and

respect such—if I do not feel intensely and most humbly grateful for them, I do not deserve to be admitted into civilised society, far less into yours, Miss Barham.”

“Please don’t talk in that way; I did not mean to imply you were anything bad; how could I, when I know you love Hilary so?—but I am sure you give me credit for a great deal more good than I deserve.”

“I do not think that possible.”

“Amiable people always do give the sunshine of their own virtues to their companion’s character,” said Dora, somewhat thoughtfully.

Maurice kept his gratification to himself, and wisely changing the subject to one less personal, began relating to Dora all the arrangements which had been made by Charles Huyton and Victoria for the accommodation of his sisters.

This was followed by a warm eulogium from Dora of the virtues and amiability of Mr. Huyton, in which, as on most other subjects, there

was a wonderful similarity in their opinions ; and after lingering together in that pleasant retreat a longer time than it was at all prudent for a poor lieutenant to spend in the bewitching society of the co-heiress of the Abbey, they at length remembered that they might as well return to the world, unsympathising and hard-hearted as Dora had just discovered it to be.

On the whole, in spite of her tears and agitation, Dora felt, as she considered the circumstances of the afternoon, that the party had produced quite as much pleasure as she had anticipated ; by no means a common occurrence. This was her conclusion, as she stationed herself by Sybil's side, on the quiet sofa where she and Mr. Farrington were composedly conversing ; and as Maurice had nothing to do, more perfectly natural and justifiable than to seat himself close to his sister, and remain there to take care of her, Dora seemed likely to have a good deal more enjoyment.

The shades of evening came down ; and

though dancing in the house had been given up, as the fireworks had not, in due time the company betook themselves once more to the park, where, under the shelter of the trees, they could conveniently view the display of cascades, bouquets, stars, serpents, and initial devices, with which the pyrotechnist was to delight them ; the whole effect being doubled by the reflection in the waters.

“ I really cannot go out again,” said Mrs. Fielding to Sybil ; “ perhaps, if you wish it, your brother will go with you to see these fireworks.”

Sybil hesitated ; she would rather have gone to Hilary.

“ Do come,” said Dora, coaxingly, and foolishly anxious to enjoy the walk with Maurice. “ I want so to see them, Sybil dear, do come.”

Sybil consented ; Mr. Farrington gave her his arm ; Mrs. Fielding insisted on her wrapping an additional shawl over her shoulders, to guard

her from the night air. Dora said she would like one also, and sent Maurice to find a cashmere she had left in the cloak room. At that moment, Lady Margaret called Dora, who explained that she was waiting for her shawl, and would follow with Sybil and Mr. Farrington; she begged the others not to wait, and Lady Margaret, satisfied that Mr. Farrington, who belonged to their party, should be Dora's escort, went on; but as Maurice was some minutes finding the proper article, her aunt was quite out of sight, before Dora, with Sybil, went after them.

Dora was only too happy: the fireworks were nothing to her; but the gentle grace with which she was guarded, and the quiet strength of the arm on which she leant, were pretty nearly all she cared for in the world at the moment: she would not think of results, or calculate consequences; all she wished was to prolong the pleasant intercourse, dangerous as it might be to future peace.

Something was said about his profession, and Maurice expressed his hopes of very soon being employed afloat. Dora started, and inquired, in a faltering voice, if he wanted to go ?

“Of course I do, in one sense,” was his answer ; and even, as he spoke, he could feel the nervous, tremulous movement of the little hand which rested on his arm. “My first wish is to distinguish myself—to obtain promotion—to rise. One cannot do that without serving.”

“I suppose honour and glory *ought* to be a sailor’s first wish ?” said Dora, in a slightly disconcerted tone, as if she did not like the thought.

“The honour leads to promotion ; and on promotion, all one’s hopes of domestic happiness, the power of settling in life, making a home of one’s own, and living in it, depend. One must work, deny oneself now, to rest and enjoy hereafter,” was his answer.

“Then you will not be always be going to sea?” continued she.

“I don’t know. Perhaps not.”

“Or wishing it? I suppose, then, you would be really glad to get an appointment now—to-morrow—any day?”

“Not quite to-morrow, unless Hilary is well first; and come when it will, it is a desperate struggle, Miss Barham, to leave all that is dearest and sweetest on earth, for the chances of being tossed about, living amongst wild and careless companions, exposed to all manner of little trials and vexations, and no woman near to soothe one; no sweet sister to smile one into patience; no sister’s sweeter friend to bewitch one into forgetfulness. Don’t think we are all stones or blocks, because we do our best to put on the look of unconcern, Miss Barham. It often hides a very heavy heart.”

“And how soon can you be promoted?” inquired Dora, after a little pause, not feeling

herself exactly equal to pursuing the conversation on the same topic.

He told how long he must serve before he had the claim ; how much longer, probably, before he could have the chance to be promoted. Then, as she continued silent, he went on, emboldened by the darkness and the solitude, for they were a little apart from the others, and no one could see anything distinctly.

“ I am not sure whether I ought to say it, but I have so longed to express—do not be angry with me for mentioning the subject—to express my gratitude to you for the trouble you took for my benefit. I have never dared speak of it before. Perhaps I may not have another opportunity.”

“ I was very glad to do it,” said Dora, hurriedly ; “ but *you* owe me no thanks, it was for Hilary I asked ; you know I had never seen you then !”

“ I am perfectly aware of that ; I never flattered myself it was personal regard for me ; the

kindness, I know, was to Hilary ; but the benefit was to myself. Whatever I felt at the time, I can only say now, the rank is dearer to me, when I remember from whose hand I received it ; and my earnest wish not to disgrace my name, my profession, and my country, is changed into a longing, ardent desire to show that I am sensible of the honour done me, and will do anything, lay down my life, were it necessary, to try and deserve it."

"Heaven forbid!" murmured Dora ; "don't say such dreadful words ; you make me feel as if I should be a murderess. Please don't be too anxious to distinguish yourself."

"I hope you will never have to blush for your kindness, Miss Barham. There is little danger, in these times of peace, of anything leading me to too great distinction."

"And I—oh, Mr. Duncan ! if your promotion should lead to any misfortune, I should never forgive myself for having interfered ; I could

never look at Hilary again." Dora spoke with great emotion.

"Nay, do not distress yourself, dear Miss Barham ; events and their results are not in our own hands, and we are not responsible for them. We have but to do and dare ; you in small things at home, perhaps ; I in more distant, but may be, not more trying scenes abroad ; to go forward bravely, trusting heartily in Providence, do our duty firmly, and leave the rest to Heaven, that is our best as well as wisest course ; and if the end should be stormy, let us still trust and be strong."

"I never was strong ; I never can be brave. I am afraid of storms, and whenever some people tell me one thing is right, and others declare the contrary, as so often happens to me, then I become so puzzled, that I can do nothing at all. You do not know the misery of indecision."

"No ; but we all have the compass and chart to guide us, and can mostly find a pilot, if the passage is very shoal, and the rocks are intricate,

and the navigation too puzzling for us ; and there are light-houses and buoys too, to direct us right. Do you understand me ?”

“ I think I do ; but although I hear of rules, and discipline, and self-control, when I go to church, and have been taught to reverence the Holy Word, and believe in the existence of conscience, theoretically, practically it is all nothing to me. I do not understand it. I dare say I ought not to say this to you. It seems strange to confess all this ; only you led to the subject, and I can see that what is all a mist and unsubstantial phantasmagoria to me, is a light and comfort, and real guiding force, an existing present support, to such as you and Hilary.”

“ And to you also, if you choose, Miss Barham.”

“ Oh no ! never to me ; I am too weak to lay hold of them, too foolish to understand them. Life in itself frightens me. It has claims to which I ought to attend ; but if I try, a whole host of ceremonies, fashions, customs,

prejudices, follies, rise up between me and my duties ; I stretch out my hand, and cannot reach it, and spend my time in sighing and idle wishes."

"And I am not theologian or philosopher enough to know what advice to give you. I think, however, I understand your feeling. I wish I could help you."

"I was brought up," continued Dora, "to value nothing but what contributed to outward show ; to consider only appearances ; to act only for effect ; I feel the whole root and source of my actions is false ; I despise myself, but I do not know how to mend it. I have waked up to a sense that there ought to be reality in life, but know not how to find or make it."

"Take one duty at a time, and conquer that ; give yourself one good rule, and act upon it ; do not look at every thing at once, or you are bewildered by what is before you. One takes the problems of Euclid, one by one, and learns them all ; without a gradual advance, or begin-

ning at the simplest, how could we get on ?”

“ If I only had some one to guide and teach me always ; some one like Hilary, who could keep me right,” sighed Dora. Sybil just then joined them, and their conversation was ended for the time ; but Dora, when Maurice wished her good night at parting, whispered : “ I shall try to remember ;” and his answer was an enthusiastic “ *I shall never forget.*”

CHAPTER II.

————— “Let their hands
Tremble, and their cheeks be flame,
As they feel the fatal bands
Of love they dare not name,
With a wild, delicious pain,
Twine about their hearts.”

TRISTRAM AND ISEULT.

GWYNETH and Captain Hepburn drove home through the beautiful twilight together.

“I do not think we need alarm your father very much,” said he, after a considerable silence : “there is every hope that she will be better to-morrow.”

“Oh, yes ! I have no doubt of that,” said Gwyneth ; “and I am not afraid about my father,

he is too reasonable to entertain foolish fears ; and now that all risk and danger are over, there can be no real ground for alarm."

" We must be careful in telling it," continued he ; " you will be able to break the news to him perhaps ; a woman's tact is best : you will undertake it."

" I have no doubt but that I can do it—I am not at all afraid. There is every probability that Hilary will be home to-morrow," repeated she:

Gwyneth's sanguine anticipations rather surprised Captain Hepburn ; he had seen Dr. Pilgrim himself, just before quitting 'the Ferns,' and had learnt that the danger of fever was very far from passed away : the doctor had spoken openly to him, considering him a friend of the family, who had a right to know, and had told him that the result must be a matter of great anxiety, whilst the symptoms were so alarming. As, however, there was room to hope that to-morrow might bring a better re-

port, and relieve all apprehension, he considered that there was no reason for exciting unnecessary fears ; and also that if Gwyneth did not know how much there was still to dread, she would be quite secure from giving alarms which might eventually prove unfounded.

She really managed it very well ; and though Mr. Duncan heard the intelligence with emotion, he bore it with the firmness and resignation of a Christian. It was quite evident, however, to the keen perception of his guest, that he did not share in the hopeful anticipations of his daughter. He did not check her, it was true, but allowed her to reckon with confidence on the safe return of the other three to the Vicarage the next day ; but when she was out of the room, forgetful of Captain Hepburn's presence, who had been sitting some time in silence, the blind old man clasped his hands together, and breathed out in deep, heartfelt tones of patient resignation, his fears, and his aspirations for submission, if the

stroke he dreaded should be really impending.

Captain Hepburn was deeply affected. The thoughts of what Hilary was in that home, of her importance to her sisters, her indispensability to her father ; of what it would be for them to lose the music of her voice, the sunshine of her smile ; for that parent no more to feel the touch of those gentle hands, tending his infirmities with such indefatigable zeal ; or to hear the light echo of her busy feet, as she passed by in her accustomed household duties : for all, to miss her in her usual seat, in her daily walks, from her place at church ; these thoughts were so replete with sadness, so full of heart-sinking desolation, that his whole soul was moved at the idea.

He crossed the room, and laying his hand gently on that of his host, said in a voice which, in spite of his utmost efforts, was unsteady with deep feeling—

“Dear sir, if your fears should be realised,

may your prayers be granted too ! but, from my soul, I trust they may prove groundless, and that Heaven may long, long bless you with such a treasure as your daughter must be to you."

"Thank you, Captain Hepburn ; I believe you are a true friend to me and mine, and I owe you much, much more than I can speak. If you could save Hilary for us, I believe you would, although you do not know half her worth. But when one has an angel-visitant on earth, one feels her stay must be precarious, and may be short."

"Perhaps so ; but surely Heaven will hear your prayers, and she will be restored."

"Captain Hepburn, when you have twice mourned, as I have done, over the heart's dearest treasure, you will learn perhaps, better I hope than I have learnt the lesson, not to make a mortal's life your idol ; and to know that the Love which is above all other love, sees not as we see, judges not as we judge, but works always for our best and surest interests, even when

it thwarts our weak and passionate desires here. We never know what is unfortunate or what is good for us, except the one thing, submissive trust. I have no other wish, but that come what may, I may be patient and resigned."

Captain Hepburn was silent. What was his short-lived affection, true and warm as it was, compared with the fond love of a father for his eldest daughter? His heart smote him for his selfish wishes, as he thought that he had even for a moment contemplated taking her away himself; that he had hoped to tempt her to another home.

"No, never," said he to himself, "never will I rob their household of its dearest treasure; never shall this fond and trusting father charge me with stealing away the daughter in whom he delights. Every selfish desire of my own shall yield to his happiness, and unless I can really fill the place of a son to him, I will not deprive him of the child on whom his comfort depends. If my love can add to their happiness, it will be

well for me ; if not, it must be crushed and extinguished in the performance of higher duties."

As it would probably be late before Maurice returned from 'the Ferns,' they persuaded the Vicar not to sit up, promising that he should immediately hear the report which his son would bring ; and more for Gwyneth's sake than his own, he yielded to their wishes ; so the visitor remained alone to wait his friend's arrival, and wile away the long minutes as best he could. He had plenty of time for reflection and consideration then ; time to recal all that Victoria had told him, to weigh her words, and guess what her motives were : time to remember Hilary's smile and blush, as she talked of the violets with him ; time to take from his bosom that little bunch of flowers with its soiled and dabbled white ribands, and to smooth and dry that valued memorial of her peril and his exertions, which he had picked from the grass where it had dropped as Maurice raised her in his arms ;

time, too, to put up ardent prayers for her safety and petitions for her happiness ; and to endeavour to judge how far that happiness was likely to be affected by his continuing there, persevering in an attempt to win her heart, and obtain a promise of her love and faith.

The report which Maurice brought, did not materially differ from the opinion Dr. Pilgrim had given to Captain Hepburn. She was sleeping, but not quietly ; there was still threatening of fever, which might subside in the night, or might increase towards morning. Mr. Huyton had persuaded the doctor to remain all night at 'the Ferns,' and Maurice intended to ride over before breakfast the next morning, to ascertain, as early as possible, how she had passed the night. Not that the brother was much alarmed ; his sanguine temper and cheerful disposition made him take a happier view of probabilities than the father or the lover could do, and he anticipated with tolerable steadiness a much better report in the morning ; or even should

there be a little fever for a day or two, it need be nothing to alarm them ; she was always well, and he did not think her delicate ; surely there could be little serious fear, although there was room perhaps for some anxiety.

So thought and argued Maurice, and apparently Captain Hepburn agreed with him : he was, however, found anxiously pacing up and down the green, the next morning, when Maurice returned from his early ride ; and the eagerness with which he asked for intelligence, rather by look than word, did not indicate calm indifference, or careless certainty.

“ Not so well—feverish and restless ; still Dr. Pilgrim hopes the best, and thinks it will soon pass off ; however, she must see no one but her nurses, and is to be kept quiet. Nest was sleeping soundly, and, to guess from appearances, would wake quite well.”

Such was the report. Charles had promised to come over rather late in the forenoon, to bring word how she was going on, as the doctor

had recommended some new mode of treatment, from which he expected much benefit.

Just as they were sitting down to breakfast, the letters arrived. Among those for Captain Hepburn, there was one large, business-like, official-looking letter, with "On her Majesty's Service," in the corner, which was not to be seen and opened without some excitement.

It was too truly a summons away from Hurst-dene ; a notification that his presence was greatly desired at the Admiralty, to receive his appointment to the command of a vessel fitting out at Sheerness. There was time neither for delay nor hesitation—go he must that very day : though to leave Hilary without seeing her again, ill, in his rival's house, and utterly ignorant of his hopes, his love, his sincere love for her, was a trial which required no small amount of self-command and resolution to bear calmly.

Long he sat, with his eyes bent upon the letter, with lips compressed and brows slightly knit, and cheeks glowing even through that

bronzed complexion, before he could force from his tongue the words which must announce his departure, or trust his voice to speak without betraying more than he desired. How he craved a little delay ; could he but have waited a week, oh, how precious the days would have been ! Or had the appointment come before he had known and loved, how welcome would then have been the announcement.

But it must be done—the words must be spoken ; was he turning craven then, to shrink from the duties he had undertaken, from the sacrifice required of him ! Would Hilary esteem one who valued inglorious sloth and pleasure, beyond exertion and honour, and self-denial and courage !

He tossed the letter across to Maurice.

“There,” said he with a smile, “see there ; read it aloud, Maurice, and let your father hear !”

Maurice did so.

“Oh, Captain Hepburn,” exclaimed Gwyneth,

starting up and looking over her brother's shoulder, as he read ; " it is an appointment ! it will take you away ! how sorry, how very sorry I am ! "

" Thank you, Miss Gwyneth ; your sorrow is more than I deserve ; *your* congratulations will be different, Duncan, I expect ; shall I apply for you ? "

" Do, sir, I shall be delighted," exclaimed Maurice, professional zeal and enthusiasm for the moment overpowering, with their warm glow, the cooler calculations of love, or home affections. " I should be happy indeed to serve with you again. "

" And *I* must go to-day," observed Captain Hepburn, struggling with his own feelings in the wish to appear cheerful.

" To-day ! " again exclaimed Gwyneth, " and Hilary away, and not able to say good-bye, nor Sybil either ; oh, do stay at least till to-morrow, and see Sybil again ! "

" You are inconsiderate, my dear Gwyneth, "

said her father ; “ you ought to know that duty admits of no delay, and that his profession has claims on Captain Hepburn beyond and above all private ties or inclinations.”

“ True, my dear sir, it leaves me no choice, no room for hesitation, which perhaps is a blessing. Could I consult my feelings, Miss Gwyneth, thus abruptly, and under such circumstances, to quit your father’s roof, would be the last thing I should wish ; nothing would be more precious to me than delay, might I indulge in it.—Maurice, will you help me to make arrangements as to the means of going ?”

In a couple of hours more, everything was ready for starting, and Captain Hepburn had nothing to do, but to say farewell to his host and Gwyneth.

“ If it is in your power,” said Mr. Duncan, as he grasped the sailor’s hand, “ we shall be happy to see you here again before leaving England ; do let us hear from you, at least.”

“If possible, I will run down and see you again,” said the other, warmly; “it will not be want of will that can stop me, my dear sir; I shall be very, very busy, I know; but my memory and my heart will be here with you; and my first wish will be that you may have improving tidings of your daughter to communicate. Maurice has promised to write.”

“You shall hear regularly, if you are so kind as to wish it,” replied the clergyman; “but, Captain Hepburn, take your heart to your work, or I fear it will be but ill-performed, and we shall have spoilt a good officer.”

“My professional heart, sir, may go with me; but when memory wishes to conjure up an image of domestic happiness, purity, piety, affection, truth, and all lovely virtues, it will certainly go back mechanically to the Vicar of Hurstdene and his charming daughters.”

“God bless you!” replied the other, shaking his hand again and again: “you have been a blessing to me and mine; I owe you, under

Providence, the lives of one, two, perhaps three of my children; and if a father's warmest prayers, and most heartfelt benediction, can call down aught of blessing or well-being for you, then may you be sure of happiness, lasting, satisfying happiness, wherever you may go. Farewell!"

To such words, at such a moment, the only answer was the low, earnest "Thank you!" of subdued feeling, and the close-pressed hand lingering long in a friendly grasp.

Both Gwyneth's hands, taken and clasped in silence for a moment, and then a softly whispered "Farewell!" which the quivering lip could hardly utter, was all he had firmness for, as he turned away.

"Have you no message for the absent ones?" inquired she, half-reproachfully, as she accompanied him to the porch.

"I pass 'the Ferns' on my road; I shall call there to hear the latest news, and, at least,

see your sisters, Sybil and Nest," was his justification, which amply satisfied Gwyneth.

He reached 'the Ferns' just as Charles Huyton was on the point of stepping into his carriage to drive over to the Vicarage ; he turned back, however, and accompanied his guest into the house, who explained his errand as they crossed the hall.

"I congratulate you on your appointment," exclaimed Charles, with much sincerity ; "I am truly rejoiced to hear it. I have learnt enough of a sailor's feelings, during my acquaintance with Maurice, to know how, beyond all other things, they value professional employment, and covet professional distinction. I will call my cousin to you, and, perhaps, as you are going, you will like to say good-bye to Miss Sybil Duncan and little Nest."

"It was the particular object of my stopping here ; if you will let Miss Sybil know I am here, I dare say she will see me ; but do not

disturb Miss Fielding on my account, if she is engaged."

Mr. Huyton sent a message to Sybil, to inform her who waited for her in the saloon. In a moment she came running down.

"How good of you to call, Captain Hepburn! I saw Maurice this morning, did he tell you?" Her eyes filled with tears as she spoke.

"Could you come out with me for five minutes on the lawn?" said he, determined to speak to her without Mr. Huyton's presence; and almost without waiting for her acquiescence, he drew the hand which he had been holding under his arm, and led her out through the open window.

"Tell me truly, how is your sister now?" was his first question.

"Restless and feverish, but not worse—rather better if any thing; but to be kept quite quiet."

"Thank Heaven! I am come to say good-bye to you," he added, in a changed voice.

She started, and exclaimed—

“Why, *must* you just now?”

He explained; and Sybil knew enough of the service to be aware that there was no choice in such a case. She listened quietly, but her eyes filled with tears as he spoke.

“You must go then,” said she, sorrowfully; “how we shall miss you; I suppose I ought to be glad that you are employed, but I am so selfish as to feel very, very sorry to part. We owe you so much; and when you are gone, how can we show our gratitude to you, or make you feel how we thank you every day? What can we do for you?”

“Remember me, dear Sybil; and help others, your sister above all, to remember me too. Do not let absence or time make you forget me,” said he; formality giving way before warmly-excited feeling.

“Forget you! oh, Captain Hepburn, never! we none of us *can* do that. Hilary, when she knows what has happened to you, will grieve

that she has not thanked you with her own lips ; but will she ever *forget* the preserver of Nest ? One of the few things she has said, has been to express her gratitude, and to charge me, when I saw you, to say how infinitely she felt your courage ; and how much more she thanked you for that action than she would have done for her own life alone. I hoped, in a few days, you would have heard it from herself ; but since that cannot be, you must try to be satisfied with her gratitude second-hand. What shall I say to her from you, in answer, when I can talk to her again ?”

“Tell her that nothing dearer than duty would have taken me away from Hurstdene at the present moment ; and that so soon as duty permits, I pledge myself to be here again. Meantime, I shall write to Maurice.” His tone gave additional force to his words.

“Write often, do,” said Sybil, earnestly looking at him, with an appreciation of his meaning dawning on her.

“As often as I can. I must not linger now.” He felt that he was understood, but dared not say more.

They turned towards the house.

“Mr. Huyton wants my father and Gwyneth to come over here to remain,” said Sybil, as they retraced their steps; “he is going to fetch them, if he can.”

“That is very kind; it will be more comfortable for you.”

They entered the saloon, and found Victoria there; Mr. Huyton was looking slightly impatient.

Miss Fielding's greetings and adieux were, like herself, lively, gracious, and emphatic. The traveller did not linger a minute more, and as soon as he was gone, Charles Huyton drove off to the Vicarage, for the purpose Sybil had named. The latter went out again for a short stroll. Hilary was sleeping, and her sister, fearful of disturbing her, resolved not to return until summoned on her awakening.

Nest, though pretty well, had enjoyed so prolonged a slumber, that she was not yet dressed ; so Sybil resolved to refresh herself by a solitary walk under the beautiful avenue in front of the house. The sound of a horse approaching roused her from a reverie, and looking up, she saw Mr. Farrington, who, immediately on perceiving her, alighted, and giving his horse to the groom, joined her in her walk. His object was to inquire for Miss Duncan ; he had been deputed by the party at the Abbey to come over early for news ; and the sisters, themselves, or some of them, were intending to drive to ‘the Ferns’ later in the day to see Sybil, and hear the bulletin in person.

This was his account of himself ; perhaps it would have been more strictly accurate, had he said that he had volunteered the service, which otherwise the groom would have performed alone ; and that, though feeling a natural interest in the welfare of a young lady in such circumstances as Hilary, he yet thought and

cared a great deal more about her sister. His fancy had been strangely captivated by the tall, handsome girl, whose appearance and manners had haunted his memory, and formed the principal subject of his conversation with Dora Barham all the morning.

Sybil turned when he joined her, and walked towards the house, from which they were distant about a quarter of a mile; giving him, as they went along, first, an answer to his inquiries after her sister; and then a voluntary detail of her regret at parting with Captain Hepburn, whom they all valued so highly.

Mr. Farrington listened with real interest to the account of the family obligations to the gallant officer, and readily conceded that they owed him great gratitude for an amount of benefit not often bestowed by one person. He would have admired and applauded kindness and courage under any circumstances; but when the narrative was enforced by the bright flash of those large dark eyes, and the peculiarly

sweet tones of the voice which recounted it, his enthusiastic appreciation of Captain Hepburn's merits was quite equal to what even Sybil considered right and becoming.

Her energetic eloquence was interrupted by a slight incident: glancing upwards as she spoke, and quite forgetting all minor considerations, she hit her foot against a projecting root, and was very nearly thrown down on her face: she was not hurt, only a little confused at her awkwardness, as she called it; but the gentleman persuaded her to take his arm after that, and the abrupt pause which ensued was broken by his starting another topic, namely, that he had to return to London the next morning, having only come down to the Abbey for a couple of days, for the sake of Mr. Huyton's party.

This information by no means disturbed Sybil in the way in which Captain Hepburn's departure had affected her. She had found Mr. Farrington a pleasant companion, but she

had not expected even to see him a second time, and there was neither any surprise or regret visible, when he talked of going. It seemed to her simply natural. He talked of regret, and said a good deal about his memory lingering amidst the green shades of 'the Ferns,' and his wish to visit this country again; to which Sybil listened quietly, and presently observed, "If he liked it so much, what would prevent his coming?" He could not construe her remark into anything approaching to conscious encouragement; she did not seem to have an idea that she had the least to do with his coming or wishing to come: he found this natural simplicity particularly captivating, and his admiration for her mind increased as much as his conviction for her uncommon beauty did. He thought her more lovely by daylight, in a simple morning dress, than he had done the evening before, in her more elaborate toilette.

In spite of all his efforts to lengthen out the walk, by stopping to admire glens in the park,

or remarkably fine trees, or to conjecture the date of the mansion, she yet proceeded so decidedly onwards, with so evident a resolution to reach the house, that he was compelled to suppose her quite indifferent to any peculiar charm in his society, or very strictly correct in her notions of propriety and etiquette. He tried to flatter himself rather it was the latter, as she was evidently very young, and young girls, he believed, are always either rigidly prudent, or immensely careless about decorum; but he could not quite convince himself that this was the fact; he was too diffident, indeed, to be very certain on this point.

On she walked, at least, straight into the house, and never lingered till they reached the saloon where Mrs. Fielding and her daughter were sitting. Then she quietly said that she would go up and learn the very latest tidings of Hilary, for Isabel and Dora's benefit, seeming to expect he would instantly start off to the Abbey with the report. The interval was em-

ployed by him in learning from Victoria all the particulars relative to the expected visit of Mr. Duncan, whom Charles hoped to bring back with them ; an announcement which excited so strong a wish in Mr. Farrington to see the clergyman, that the ladies proposed at once that he should stay and lunch at 'the Ferns,' sending the groom back to the Abbey with the report he had come to fetch.

No pressing was needed to elicit a very ready acceptance of this proposition ; and, to say the truth, Victoria was as glad of the company of a pleasant and gentlemanlike young man, as he could be to stay. The morning after a fête is generally flat and dull ; and if a gentleman desires to make his presence thoroughly appreciated, he should contrive to drop in on such an occasion, amongst a family party in the country.

On Sybil's return, she seemed rather surprised to find that the message was to be intrusted to the groom ; and apparently doubtful

whether he could convey safely so important a verbal communication as that Miss Duncan was asleep, but seemed much the same, she indited a little note to Dora Barham; and by this means that young lady became possessed of the interesting fact, that the whole family from the Vicarage were expected at 'the Ferns,' to remain there as long as Hilary's health required it.

Nest, who was now quite well, had entered the room with Sybil, and the gentleman soon coaxed her on to his knee, and began conversing with her about her home, her father, and her sisters: they were excellent friends before Sybil's note was finished.

"How wonderfully the sisters are alike," said he to Victoria, as he gazed admiringly at the little one's large black eyes, and raven hair; "I should like a sketch of this child."

"I believe I can show you some, although I cannot give them to you," replied Victoria, going to a large portfolio which was standing

near. She opened the boards, and began to turn over the sketches it contained. He put down Nest, and went to examine it with great interest ; there were many views in the forest, at the sight of which Nest frequently exclaimed she knew that spot, or she had seen this in Hilary's sketch-book ; and when Sybil joined them, she seemed to know every view, and owned that they had all been together, when such or such was done. At last they came to some groups of figures ; the sisters again and again, Hilary always principal ; and then single drawings, Sybil, Gwyneth, and Nest, evidently younger, and more childish, but still very like. There was no finished drawing of Hilary alone ; and Sybil owned that her sister never had sat to Mr. Huyton, as they had, again and again ; she did not know why, perhaps he had never asked her : the views there were of her, were taken by stealth, or done from memory, perhaps.

“ It is hardly fair to show drawings which

so plainly tell a tale," whispered Mr. Farrington to Victoria, when Sybil had turned away to listen to Mrs. Fielding's questions. "If these were mine, I would not allow them to be carelessly examined and investigated."

"Oh ! I am breaking no confidence," replied Victoria, in a laughing whisper ; " Charles makes no secret of his object ; the whole plan and intention of yesterday's fête, was to distinguish *one* person above all others ; and though we did not propose to risk drowning her, yet, I believe, he will by no means regret the accident, if all ends well. At any rate, it has secured him some important advantages."

Mr. Farrington looked excessively surprised at this communication, and made a mental determination to keep his own counsel, so far as Victoria was concerned, unless he wanted all the world to know his affairs.

Sybil disappeared again just after this, much to Mr. Farrington's disappointment ; the only amusement left for him was what Victoria sup-

plied ; and although she was very entertaining and agreeable, as he was wishing all the time for something else, her powers of pleasing were lost upon him.

“ Where have you been ? ” was Victoria’s question, when Sybil joined them at the luncheon table ; to which she replied, “ She had gone out to finish her walk, as Hilary was still sleeping soundly ; and she wished when her father arrived, to be quite fresh and ready to attend to him.”

Very fresh, and very handsome, too, she looked, with the bright colour which exercise had brought into her cheeks, and the happy expression which a conviction that her sister was now doing very well, produced ; and her perfect unconsciousness that Mr. Farrington’s visit was made for her sake, or that his eyes were incessantly attracted to her in admiration, greatly heightened her charms in his opinion. He tried to detain her in conversation ; but no sooner was the luncheon finished, than she

again withdrew, and remained invisible for the next hour.

It was not Mr. Farrington's conversational powers which brought her down at last, but the arrival of her own family, with Charles Huyton. No sooner did she see the carriage at a little distance, than she ran hastily down stairs, and was on the steps to receive her father when it drew up, quite regardless of all the state formalities of porter, butler, or footman, who had to stand off to make way for her.

Charles sprang out first, and his enquiries of "How is she now? How is Hilary?" were hardly less earnest and eager than those of Gwyneth and Maurice. But Sybil had scarcely words to answer them: it was to her father she looked, of him she thought; and when, by the assistance of his son and host, the clergyman had been safely placed upon the broad steps, she threw herself into his arms, and in accents choking from delight, she whispered

that Hilary was better, Dr. Pilgrim had just seen her, and said she was out of danger.

Mr. Farrington, who was standing near enough to see the meeting, thought he had never witnessed a more touching sight, than the glad thankfulness of the young people, and the deep, reverend gratitude of the father, as he raised his hat from his head, and uttered audible thanks for this joyful tidings. Mr. Huyton himself was in a state of excitement most visible to a calm looker-on; he shook hands ardently with Mr. Duncan, kissed the hands of Sybil and Gwyneth with most un-English grace, and as to Nest, he caught her up in his arms and almost smothered her with caresses, the overflowings of a full-hearted happiness.

They became rational at last, and moved into the house. It was necessary that Miss Duncan should still be kept quiet; but, under promise of silence and discretion, Gwyneth was permitted to take her sister's place in watching the

invalid, and Sybil was able to devote herself to her father.

Mr. Farrington's wish of being introduced to the clergyman was gratified, and he found the next hour spent in conversing with him, and looking at Sybil, so very pleasant, that he heard with great regret the announcement of the arrival of Mr. Barham and his daughter. This brought back Charles Huyton and Maurice into the saloon, they having been pacing on the terrace, and discussing the wishes of the latter to sail with Captain Hepburn, in which Mr. Huyton very cordially joined.

Dora's veil and bonnet hid her face from her father when she spoke to Maurice, and after a few fluttered sentences, she turned to Sybil, and asked if she might not go up stairs and see Gwyneth for a minute; so the two girls left the room together, with a word of apology to Victoria. Then Mr. Barham expressed a strong wish to see some alterations Mr. Huyton was making in his hot-houses, and Isabel said she

should like to accompany them; Victoria politely offered to go with her, and as Charles seemed to regret leaving Mr. Duncan, both Maurice and Mr. Farrington volunteered to remain with him; whilst Mrs. Fielding, just then entering the room, declared it was her peculiar right to wait on and attend to him, when he was at 'the Ferns.'

Had Mr. Barham and Isabel intended to do what was most pleasant, but least profitable, to Dora and Maurice, they could hardly have arranged better. Sybil and her friend returned to the saloon, to find the party very much reduced; and as Mrs. Fielding was as good as her word, and entirely engrossed Mr. Duncan, Mr. Farrington enticed Sybil to sit down with him by the portfolio before alluded to, to tell him more about the beautiful sketches it contained; and she, quite unaware how little he had cared for them when only Victoria had turned them over, very good-naturedly complied with his request, and discussed the times and places

where the sketches had been drawn, with such amusing vivacity, and in such graphic language, that he did not discover how time slipped by whilst so employed.

Why Dora and Maurice chose at the same time to go out of the window, and continued for the next hour to walk slowly up and down a long green alley beside the flower garden, or to stand in deep talk, leaning over a pedestal, was best known to themselves. Mr. Barham was so very well satisfied to see his eldest daughter attended through his gardens by Mr. Huyton, and leaning on his arm, that he quite forgot to think about how little Dora was employed; he could not on any account hurry a stroll which afforded Isabel so good an opportunity of displaying her interest in science, and her peculiarly sensible opinions relative to the regulation of hot-houses, gardeners, village schools, farmers' prejudices, and the poor-law; on all which subjects she spoke with much earnestness and grace. Mr.

Huyton being much too well bred to show how excessively he was bored, or in the slightest degree to hurry Miss Barham, although longing to return to the house, the elder gentleman was quite persuaded that he was delighted with their society, and fully appreciated the honour done to him by the owner of Drewhurst Abbey, and his eldest daughter. He judged Charles by himself; and conscious that no claims of civility would have made *him* submit to a *gêne* of any kind, and that the use he made of politeness and courtesy, was, not to please others at his own expense, but to gratify himself on all occasions without actually giving offence, he conjectured that what was so gracefully borne, must be a pleasure in itself; and lingered long on purpose ere he brought his visit to a close.

And all this time Maurice and Dora were together, on a warm, sunshiny May afternoon, straying in a beautiful garden, where early roses, lilacs, and hawthorns, mingled their

scent with the rich rhododendrons, daphnes, and still rarer exotics with which the flower-beds were glowing, and talking as young people will talk, when, in the warm glow of true first-love, they forget the cold calculations of worldly prudence, and ambitious hopes.

He told her how suddenly Captain Hepburn had been called away, and she turned pale, and her voice faltered, as she suggested that the same thing might occur to him ; and when she heard that his friend had promised to apply for him, and that his interest was such that there was little doubt the application would be successful, she was quite unable to conceal how much she was pained at the idea. In vain she tried to say she wished him honour and success in his profession ; she was too sincere to deceive, and too thoughtless to remember anything but her own emotions. And what could be the result, but that Maurice made a rash avowal of his passionate admiration and love, his presump-

tuous affection, his hopeleſs attachment, and received in return a ſtill more raſh acknowledgment, that her feelings were but too much in agreement with his own, and that the certainty of his devotion to her was the only thing which could conſole her for his departure, if he muſt go.

It was a moment of wild intoxication; the delight of knowing each other's hearts, was dearly purchased, and yet it was a delight. Their whole acquaintance had been a ſeries of inprudencies, and this converſation was but the crowning imprudence of all. For as to hope, they really, hardly dared entertain an idea of it; Dora felt, and Maurice feared, that there was ſmall chance of her father's conſent to an engagement, and without Mr. Barham's conſent, Maurice would not even aſk her to make him the ſmalleſt promiſe of conſtancy or faith.

He, indeed, would have gone ſtraight to Mr. Barham, owned his affection, and aſked to

be allowed to win her hand by gallant deeds, or constant devotion ; but Dora dared do no such thing : she shrank from cold looks, and harsh, stern words, and contempt and censure. She could not encounter Isabel's surprise, or her father's frown ; she would have gladly plighted her hand to Maurice, and would have trusted, with the coward's trust, to time or chance, to circumstances, to accident, to anything in fact, rather than to bold, straight-forward measures. It was his sense of honour, and his rectitude of feeling alone, which saved her from the misery of a clandestine engagement ; she would have ventured that for him ; she dared not be open, but she thought she could be true. His, too, was all the regret, the remorse, indeed, for what he had done. When the first violent emotion had passed away, and he saw how he had won her heart, and yet must not avow their mutual affection, he became aware how great an injury he had done her ; what a cloud he should have thrown

upon her young life, what a constant, fretting, wearing anxiety he had brought upon her. Then, in his true and honourable love, he prayed her to forget him ; not to let the thought, the memory of him, darken her days, or interfere with her future prospects. His love saw no shadow, no fault in her ; it was too warm to permit the thought that she was a coward at heart, and shrank from the only right step ; he called her weakness, gentleness, docility, feminine tenderness ; and while he would have braved all and anything for her, he almost trembled at the idea of entailing on her a moment's care or mental suffering.

“ No, I do not deserve your love ; do not make yourself unhappy for a fellow like me, dearest, sweetest Dora ! it is too good of you : I can never, never forget *you* ! but think of me only as of a brother, as of one who would bring you nothing but good, not sorrow ; think of me with kindness always, but not with sorrowful regret ; think of me as one who loves you

devotedly, passionately : I shall treasure your image in my heart, and dote upon it in my fancy, and in the lonely night-watch, dwell on the recollection of your smile ; and perhaps in moments of danger, in storm, and peril, and difficulty, your dear, bright eyes will shine on my memory, and nerve me for daring deeds ; but do not think of me, It is enough for me to know that had there been no obstacle you would have loved me ; that had my birth and fortune entitled me to ask your hand, I might have won you ; that your heart should have been mine, had Heaven so willed it. But do not grieve that we must part ; nay, do not shed those tears ; dearest Dora ! I do not deserve so very great an honour.”

As if such words would make her care less, or quiet the heart-broken sobs with which she listened to his protestations !

“ But you are not going yet ? ” she murmured.

“ Heaven knows how soon ; but, Dora, after

this, even if I do not, we must not meet again."

"Oh! Maurice," ejaculated she, in overwhelming distress.

"Not purposely, not alone; no, Dora, it has been madness, wickedness almost, to love you and make you unhappy; but we will not add to that unintentional error the real, downright crime of carrying on a secret understanding, a clandestine intercourse. If I may not ask you of your father now, at least he shall not, when I do, throw back on me the imputation that I have meanly, basely, encouraged you in defying his wishes or thwarting his hopes. If that blessed time should ever come, when I may seek you openly,—if—oh! Dora,—if you still love me in some happier future, then let us, at least, have the power of saying and feeling, we were rash, imprudent, thoughtless, but we were not deceitful."

The little hand he held, tremblingly pressed his fingers with a convulsive clasp, and then she murmured again—

“Oh ! Maurice, I will be true to you for life ; I will never, no, never, be the bride of another ; you have my heart, and shall have my faith for life.”

“No, no, Dora, you must not say so ; I will not hold you bound ; dear as your words are, sweetest ! you must take them back : no promise must be given or accepted, which truth and honour do not sanction. Time alters all, everything ; and when I am gone, and you learn to see my character as it deserves, unblinded by your own sweet fancies, and that delightful kindness which has moved you to pity a poor sailor like me, then you must still think of me as of one who would not, even for his dearest hopes, allow you to fetter yourself with a bond you might regret, with a promise which being wrong, could bring no happiness with it. Dora, your peace of mind is dearer than my own !”

“Good, kind, generous,” was all she could say.

“Give me that riband from your wrist,” added he.

She hurriedly undid the blue riband that she wore round her left arm; put it for one moment to her lips, then tossed it to him, and turned with hasty steps towards the house. He followed her quietly until he saw her enter the saloon, and turning off by another path, he escaped, to consider what had passed, and console himself with the blue riband as he could.

CHAPTER III.

“ Ah, on which, if both our lots were balanced,
Was indeed the heaviest burden thrown ?
Thou a weeping exile in thy forest,
I a smiling queen upon my throne.”

ISEULT.

THE amendment in Hilary's health continued to advance so favourably, that the next day she was considered well enough to see her father without risk from excitement, and then she began clearly to understand the fact that her whole family were at 'the Ferns.' She did not at first make any audible comments on the circumstance, but towards evening, she took the opportunity of no one but Sybil being present, to make her tell her who had proposed this ar-

rangement, and what had been said on the subject.

Sybil said it had been entirely Charles Hutton's own idea; and nothing could be kinder or more hospitable than he was, making it most pleasant for them all, and avowing that, were it not for Hilary's illness, he should be the happiest man possible, with such a family round him.

Miss Duncan lay silent for some minutes, then observed—

“Were it not that my illness makes it inevitable, we should not be here at all.”

“So Nest proved to him,” remarked Sybil; “and she added, somewhat uncourteously, she would rather have you well, and be at home.”

“Nest must not be rude, but it is well she thinks so; I must get well as fast as possible. I shall leave this room to-morrow, I hope, Sybil.”

“How glad we shall be to have you down stairs,” said her sister.

“ I shall not go down, till I am well enough to go home,” replied Hilary, decidedly ; “ I hope to get into the dressing-room to-morrow, and on Monday, if Mr. Huyton will lend us his carriage, we can all go back to the Vicarage.”

“ I am sure I shall be glad if we can,” was Sybil’s answer. She partly understood the motives of Hilary’s conduct.

“ Where is Captain Hepburn ?” added Hilary, after a pause, turning her head on the pillow of the sofa where she was lying. “ Is he gone ?”

“ He went away yesterday morning, and hopes to come back again soon. He promised he would return as soon as he could.”

There was another pause ; then Hilary asked—

“ Did you see him yesterday ?”

“ He called here to say good-bye, and hear the last account of you !”

“ Why did he go, did he tell you ?”

“ Business, indispensable business,” said Sybil, fearful of distressing her sister by announcing

his appointment, and the expected consequences to Maurice, who, Hilary well knew, had always reckoned on going with him.

“Business!” repeated Hilary, looking anxiously at her sister, “that is a vague term; however, I suppose I have no right to question about it. Gone without my being able to thank him! I should have liked to do that!”

“I gave him your message, dear Hilary; do you remember what you told me to say?”

“Yes, and he—what did he say, Sybil?” said her sister, eager to hear something, she hardly knew what. Sybil repeated Captain Hepburn’s message verbatim, and with emphasis.

It was listened to in silence, but, after a long pause, she repeated—“Duty.”

“The fact is,” added Sybil, seeing she was perplexing herself about his departure, “he has been appointed to the command of the Pandanus, a fine new screw steamer, one of the finest in the service, he says; and he has gone down to Woolwich, where she is fitting out.”

“Will he take Maurice?” exclaimed Hilary, eagerly. “Oh, I hope he will !”

“They both expect it, but there has not been time yet ; he only went yesterday ; now do lie still, dear, or you will bring on your fever again, and we shall not go home on Monday.”

Hilary laid her head back on her pillows, and remained perfectly quiet for the rest of the evening. She resolved not to think of Captain Hepburn, or to bewilder herself in conjectures relative to anything uncertain or unpleasant ; she resolutely quieted her mind, banishing doubt and conjecture, which are worse and more irritating to the weak, than certainty of evil, and dwelling only on soothing subjects.

Her self-discipline and mental government were successful, and were rewarded by finding her strength as much improved the next day as she could have expected. She was able to resume her usual dress, and sit up in the adjoining room, where the balmy air of a sweet summer Sunday morning seemed every minute to add

to her strength. She kept her resolution, however, of not going down stairs, or joining the family party, in spite of Victoria's urgent entreaties. It was quite true, that her head would not as yet bear much noise, and she had no intention of risking a relapse, by taking liberties too early.

She must, of course, have an interview with Charles eventually, and thank him for his share in saving her life, but she rather shrank from the thought; she hoped that it was not ingratitude, she really did feel thankful to him; and had there been no recollections of former conversations and past professions to trouble her, she would have been ready and anxious to express her gratitude. But now she feared to say either too little or too much; she dreaded to raise hopes which she had once trusted were extinguished, and she had a vague forboding that any sort of emotion would inevitably lead to painful and perplexing discoveries.

As memory had resumed its power, a distinct

impression of his words and tone when he reached her in the water, impressed itself on her mind with unaccountable accuracy and vividness ; and though it was not usually her way to shrink from duty, even if painful, or to put off the evil day, with that weak procrastination which often trebles the suffering by unnecessary and prolonged anticipation, she determined to delay this interview to the very last, that escape to her own home might immediately follow.

Her resolutions, however, were over-ruled, and her wishes set aside, by the stronger will, and less scrupulous determinations of others. Charles and Victoria were alike decided, that she should see him ; and Hilary found herself actually left without a choice, although nominally consulted on the occasion.

It was in the afternoon ; the family had returned from church, and Gwyneth, who had remained at home to read to Hilary, was persuaded by her to go down stairs, and if Maurice was at leisure, to ask him to come and sit with

her. A knock at the door a few minutes afterwards, made her suppose he was there; but in answer to her invitation, Victoria entered, inquired how she did, whether she was equal to conversation: and on Hilary's cheerfully assuring her that she was going on nicely, Miss Fielding added, in a manner which left her almost without choice—

“You will not mind, then, seeing Charles for a moment, who is dying of impatience to kiss your hand.”

As she said this, she admitted Mr. Huyton into the room, and then turned away towards the toilette table, where she busied herself, with her back to Hilary, in searching amongst caskets and drawers for unknown articles, with an evident determination not to see or hear anything else; which was extremely distressing to her friend, however pleasant it might be to her cousin.

Surprised and flurried by an intrusion so unexpected and unwelcome, Hilary's pale cheeks

flushed, and her hand trembled, as she endeavoured to rise from her easy chair to meet her host. Somehow, she hardly understood how, she was gently put back into it, and in another moment, she found Charles, placing one knee on the ground, was really and very warmly kissing the hand she had held out, as he pressed it in both of his. She endeavoured to draw it away ; she tried to express by a glance, that whatever gratitude might inspire, love for him did not exist ; but although words may define differences, and draw lines of distinction, it is often difficult for looks to express nice shades of feeling, and to mark accurately all the gazer would wish. At least, she feared her looks were incomprehensible ; for though Charles's tongue was mute, his eyes declared so plainly and unequivocally the ruling passion of his life at that time, that it was perfectly impossible for her actually to misunderstand him. She saw that Victoria was nothing, and that she was all to him.

The colour flitted from her cheeks, and they became white, whiter than her illness had left them—deadly pale ; her hand turned cold in his grasp, and after feebly trying to draw it away, she sank back against the pillows behind her, and, for the second time in her life, she fainted.

When she recovered, she found herself lying on the sofa ; and as sense and perception gradually returned, she discovered that Charles was supporting her head on his arm, whilst Victoria was plentifully bedewing her face with eau-de-Cologne. She moved her head, and whispered, “I should like to lie down,” which compelled Mr. Huyton to resign her to the pillows, where common sense would have taught him, she had better have been all the time.

“Are you better ?” said he, softly, and anxiously.

“Yes, thank you ; please leave me, and send Sybil ;” and she fixed her eyes for one moment on him so decidedly, that disobedience was out

of his power. He was forced to withdraw, and went to find Sybil, with no other advantage from his visit, than the idea that if she was so very weak, it would be impossible for her to leave 'the Ferns' next day.

But half-an-hour's quiet restored her strength ; and reflection on what had passed, made Hilary more than ever certain of the propriety of leaving the house the next day, even should the effort be attended with fatigue to herself. It had been a transitory emotion which had made her faint ; she was not at all accustomed to such attacks ; but her physical weakness had perhaps made her feelings more than usually acute, and herself less able than in general to govern them. It was the expression of Charles Huyton's eyes which had overpowered her : she had read, or seemed to read in them, such a world of strong concentrated passion, such selfish self-will, such deep determination to carry out a point which he had never for one moment abandoned ; so much of human pride, and of

stern resolution not to submit passively or unresistingly to what thwarted his wishes, as opened up to her mind a new view of his character, and made her almost regret that he had not left her to sink under the black waters in that shady pool, rather than live to enter into a contest with one who seemed so well fitted to trample down and overpower her, when their happiness or their desires crossed. Calm reflection recalled her courage and her firmness. Let her but walk straight on, he could not hurt her. The spirit of evil itself was powerless to harm those who trusted in "the Shadow of those Almighty Wings," which she believed stretched out over her and hers: and should she then fear one who was but man? No; he might pain, but he could not injure her, unless he enticed her feet from that narrow path of duty, within which she was safe.

And as her evening prayer arose, that she might "have understanding in the way of godliness," she felt more strongly than ever that

that way did not point to becoming Charles Huyton's wife.

When the family met at breakfast the next morning, Mr. Duncan announced, that Hilary was quite well enough to go home that day, and therefore, if Mr. Huyton would be so kind as to lend them his carriage, he would no longer trespass on his hospitality.

In vain his host and Miss Fielding urged her supposed weakness, and their desires to detain them all, by every argument which love and policy could devise. Mr. Duncan was calmly immoveable, and they were obliged to yield the point at last. The younger girls, naturally enough, had enjoyed the change, and were extremely sorry to quit 'the Ferns;' but Maurice, whose spirits and gaiety seemed at times entirely to fail him, and who, except when with his father, appeared wrapped in a cloud of impenetrable gloom, was entirely on his father's side, and expressed, as warmly as politeness permitted, a strong desire to return home before his being

obliged to quit Hurstdene, an event he now daily expected.

The carriage accordingly was ordered directly after luncheon ; and meantime, Maurice walked home, to give notice that they were coming, taking Gwyneth with him, that all might be ready for the reception of Hilary.

“So you are determined to leave us,” said Victoria, as she entered the dressing-room, where Hilary had breakfasted ; “however, if you are so well, you will, I trust, come down stairs before quitting the house ; you could surely give us your company in the saloon.”

“I shall be better at home,” replied Miss Duncan ; “I am very anxious to be there on Maurice’s account, for he will want a hundred things done and arranged, and it would be much less anxiety to me to see to it all, than to remain absent, and trust to the chance of others doing right. I can keep quiet at home, you know.”

“Yes ; I can understand how quiet you will

be, from what I know of your usual habits ; you will only wait on your father incessantly, see to your brother's having every comfort, teach Nest, look after your servants, attend to the housekeeping, and listen to every old man, sick woman, or unhappy child, who may choose to come and drawl out their long story to you. That is your quiet."

Hilary laughed.

"Well, if all that is to be done, the sooner I set about it the better."

"Meantime," said Victoria, "come down stairs."

Hilary seemed inclined to demur.

"You must," continued Miss Fielding, urgently, "or I shall conclude it is want of will, not want of power, prevents you."

"I will come down by-and-bye," said Hilary, gently, "but I dare not exhaust myself before I take this little journey ; and if you would be so very kind as to let me, I should like to lie down and rest now."

Victoria really could not find in her heart to oppose Hilary's meek petition, or to say any more at present about her own wishes ; so giving her friend a kiss, she settled her comfortably on the sofa, and then left her to peace and solitude.

“ Will she not come down, Victoria ? ” asked Charles, eagerly, as he met her on the stairs.

Victoria told him what had passed, and strongly recommended, under present circumstances, patience and caution on his part. His rival, if Captain Hepburn was his rival, was gone, and had left without an explanation ; but although the field was thus open to him, it by no means followed, that he should rush forwards hastily and unadvisedly. She was not in a state to bear it, and he might lose all, by hazarding too much.

It was about half an hour before luncheon, when Hilary, leaning on Victoria's arm, eventually entered the saloon, where Mr. Huyton had been passing the morning, in an uncontrollable

state of restless impatience. How he sprang forwards to meet her at the door, and how carefully he provided the easiest chair in the pleasantest corner of the room for her accommodation, may be imagined. His manners seemed scarcely to allow that any other person could have the least claim upon her; and his whole wish seemed to be to engross her himself. But Hilary would sit near her father, would give her principal attention to him, and would at first, when she spoke, whisper in her soft voice, words which marked her regard and consideration for him as her principal object.

Presently, however, gathering courage and firmness, she turned to her host, and said :

“ I have no doubt that my father has conveyed the thanks I sent by him, Mr. Huyton ; but let me now for myself, thank you again for your share in the exertions which saved my life. I was too weak to say so yesterday. I hope you believe that I am grateful.”

“ If ever an action brought its own reward,”

said he, in a low voice, and placing his hand on the fingers which rested on the arm of her chair ; “ it was mine, when I bore you from the water, and laid you safely on the bank. I can conceive only one degree of happiness greater than that.”

“ My strength was so completely exhausted,” said Hilary, drawing away her hand to pass it across her forehead, “ that had I not been relieved from the weight of Nest, and released from her struggles, I must have sunk in another moment.”

“ Poor little thing ! she was unconscious how she increased your danger,” replied Charles ; he could not bring himself to say the words of praise to his rival’s presence of mind, which were his due, and which Hilary half hoped to hear. Presently he added, looking up suddenly :

“ And you *will* go to-day ! is that kind, Miss Duncan, to hurry away the moment you can move ; at any risk to leave my house, rather than oblige me ?”

“ You know, Mr. Huyton,” replied Hilary, “ we have sometimes other things to consider, besides obliging our friends ; but it cannot justly be called unkindness to do our duty ; and mine takes me home to-day.”

“ Of course, if your *duty* takes you away,” was his answer, “ my pleasure or happiness must not interfere with it : they have no right to be considered for a moment.”

“ I am sure my father would tell you that the two cannot really be at variance,” answered Hilary, earnestly. “ If we both follow the road of duty, we may be certain that we shall not come into dangerous collision. They are lines which never clash, except through carelessness or mistake. They may diverge widely, they may run parallel, but they will have no unsafe crossings, if we take conscience for our engineer.”

“ True, dear child,” said Mr. Duncan, “ as your favourite poet says :

‘ Duty, like a strict preceptor,
Sometimes frowns or seems to frown ;’

still, when we have the courage to look her calmly in the face, we shall find the frown is our mistake ; a mere shadow cast by fear or over-anxious wishes.”

Mr. Huyton make no farther objections, and the family were permitted to return to the Vicarage, as had been proposed. Nobody, however, could prevent his riding beside the carriage the whole way, or forbid his being there to hand Hilary out when she descended from it ; it was very disagreeable to her, but he would not see that ; and even when she entered the house, he appeared extremely reluctant to take his leave, and allow her to rest in peace.

Once more in her place at home, and gathering strength every hour, from the pleasure of being there, Hilary could not avoid immediately perceiving the extreme depression of spirits which overpowered Maurice ; and with a woman’s

quickness, made more acute by her own recent experience, she decided that his unfortunate attachment to Dora, must in some way be the cause. Of the existence of this attachment she had been for some time aware; but not guessing what had really passed between them, she concluded that it was his own sense of its hopelessness which oppressed her brother. Eager to bury those too-encroaching thoughts of another person, which were continually creeping into her mind, she would yield nothing to the lassitude of recent illness, would allow herself no rest, lest memory should be engrossed by one image; but resolutely engaged in all her usual occupations, and threw herself with more than her former zeal into the cares, hopes, and pleasures of those around her. Of these, naturally, Maurice was the first, after her father; and his affairs, indeed, were peculiarly prominent just then. Captain Hepburn had written to say, that he had received the promise of Maurice's appointment to the Pandanus; so that

they might now expect his removal any day. But however excited or restless, anxious or happy, such a prospect might make him, his sister saw clearly this was not all; and earnestly hoping that a confidence she had so long enjoyed would not now be withdrawn, she watched him with affectionate attention and silent pity.

It was not till the day following, that she received from him an explanation, which told her how truly he deserved the pity she had already bestowed, and how much real, though unacknowledged, sympathy there was between them.

They were sitting together on Tuesday afternoon, just arranging about an expedition to be undertaken by Mr. Duncan, his son, and Gwyneth, when the Drewhurst carriage drove up to the door. At the first glimpse of the liveries in the distance, Maurice had started up; but when the carriage passed the window, he sat down again quietly, and whispered to his sister, there was only Miss Barham in it.

Isabel entered alone. She came to inquire

after Hilary ; it appeared that she and her father had driven over to 'the Ferns,' expecting to find the Duncans still there ; and that on discovering the mistake, Mr. Barham had decided to remain with Mr. Huyton, having some magistrates' matters to talk over, whilst his daughter proceeded to the Vicarage. Isabel said that Mr. Huyton had offered to accompany them ; but her father thought that such an incursion in the Vicarage drawing-room would be overpowering, so after luncheon she had come alone. She would not, therefore, remain very long, as papa would be expecting her back to pick him up ; but she was delighted to see how well Hilary was looking, quite like herself again ! getting home must have done her a world of good. When questioned about her sister, she answered that Dora was not well ; she thought the hot weather disagreed with her ; she complained of head-ache ; could not eat, and was very pale : a common effect of heat on her constitution. Papa talked

of sending her to some friends in the north, for change of air. He meant to remain at the Abbey himself, for the present, and of course, Isabel must be with him : he could not spare her ; but Lady Margaret would take Dora to Scotland, or Scarborough, or Germany ; it was not quite settled which ; and she believed they would go very soon.

“ Now I must go,” exclaimed Isabel, starting up, “ or papa will not trust me alone again. Oh, by-the-bye, Mr. Maurice Duncan, I thought you were gone to sea. Surely Mr. Huyton told us you were appointed to some ship.”

“ Perhaps I may be,” said Maurice, trying to speak carelessly, then remembering that what he said might be repeated to Dora, he added, “ I expect it any day : I heard it was to come, and of course, it will be soon.”

“ Well then I wish you *bon voyage*,” replied Isabel, lightly ; “ I am so very glad to have seen you once more before you go, to say so. Good bye, Hilary, dear ! mind and get well. Do you

know, papa wants Mr. Huyton to stand for the county, and I dare say he will; and with papa's interest, I have no doubt he will succeed. He ought to be an M.P. Papa says, few people know how really clever he is, he is so quiet and modest. But we want such men for the country. So papa says. Good bye."

Hilary watched the carriage drive away, and as Isabel's pink and white feathers disappeared in the distance, she sighed to think what would she not give to be able to hope that Mr. Huyton would really transfer to the heiress of Drew-hurst Abbey the affection which he had hitherto wasted on herself.

It was with the utmost difficulty that poor Maurice was able to command his attention and spirits sufficiently to be the usual cheerful companion to his father. But on his return he hurried into the garden, and there, when Hilary was able to seek him, she discovered him stretched on the sloping bank of the terrace, with his face covered by his arms. She sat

down beside him, and gently passing her fingers through his curly hair, she whispered,

“ Dear Maurice !”

He turned his face towards her, and she, putting her lips to his cheek, again whispered,

“ I was afraid you were very unhappy.”

“ Oh, Hilary, I am such a wretch, such a thoughtless, selfish, cruel fellow ! if you knew all—” was his exclamation, with a passionate misery of look and manner most unusual to him.

“ Indeed, dear Maurice, I cannot believe you. You may, perhaps, have been thoughtless, though that is not like you ; but cruel, selfish ! never. Oh no, I know you better !”

“ You don’t know, dear ; you could not guess what I have done : how I have pained and half-broken the dearest, warmest, most loving little heart in the world ; how I have dimmed her smiles, and clouded her sunshine, and made both her head and heart ache. Yes, it is all my fault ; mine, mine entirely.”

“ Yours, dear Maurice !”

“ Yes, Hilary, she loves me ; it is no idle

vanity which misleads me ; she said it—she owned it with tears and sobs—with fear and trembling, and yet in spite of both grief and terror, that she loved me ; she, the bright—the rich—the beautiful ; she loved *me* ! and what has it brought her ? Grief and pain, sickness and fear : and all for me ! I, who though I would lay down my life for her, am not worthy to touch the tip of her little finger !—I, who have no claim, except that of deep, doting, devoted, never-ending love for her. Oh ! Hilary, is she not an angel to love me !”

“ But why, dear Maurice, why be so miserable then, if she really loves you ! does Mr. Barham object ?” asked Hilary, not quite understanding his incoherent exclamations.

“ We dared not ask him.”

“ Dared not ! Maurice, that is not like you !”

“ No ! Dora dared not. What is there that I would not dare for her that honour did not forbid ? Oh, Hilary, if you only knew how I love her !”

“ But it is a pity—nay, surely, Maurice, it is

wrong if you love thus, not to tell Mr. Barham ! concealment never can be right, and must be doubly painful !”

“ Yes, Hilary,” said her brother, rising upright and looking steadfastly at her, “ if we went on with it ; but when I found how it was, that I was not only using up my own feelings, but acting on hers—not only making myself unhappy by indulging a presumptuous passion, but involving her in the same hopeless misery, I saw there were but two ways open to us. One to explain all to Mr. Barham, and cast ourselves on his compassion ; the other to part ! I would have taken the first, there would have been far less of suffering and misery ; she judged otherwise, and we parted on Saturday. You heard what Isabel said to-day.”

“ Then you have been neither cruel nor selfish, my dear brother, but strictly honourable and right. Imprudent, perhaps, but who can control the heart by prudence, Maurice ; or prevent the growth of love, where there is sympathy and

community of feeling? We cannot either compel or forbid its existence, can we?" And Hilary blushed deeply, as she propounded a doctrine taught her by her late experience.

"I do not think that is right, Hilary," replied her brother thoughtfully, considering his own circumstances, and not suspecting from what feelings she spoke. "I believe we ought to control all our passions; and if we have not the power, it must be that we have wilfully thrown it away. Love is like ardent spirits, perhaps; we may refrain altogether, but if we do imbibe it, we must be responsible for the ungovernable evils it produces. And, oh, Hilary!" added he, throwing himself down on the grass again; "I am a wretch for having plunged Dora in such a depth of trouble; a selfish, miserable wretch—because even now, I cannot wish her not to love me; I would give the world—I would give my hopes of promotion, that she had never begun; but I cannot, try as I will, really wish her now to leave off loving me. And yet it is only sorrow and pain to her."

“But, Maurice, better times may come—why should you despair so? who knows what may happen to induce Mr. Barham to approve of your suit, and then what happiness for you?”

“What happiness indeed! I wish Dora would let me speak. I am sure it would have been better, don’t you think so, Hilary? We could but have been refused; have had to part, and to wait; we *might* have been happier. We had better have spoken.”

“Yes, I am sure of that,” said Hilary, emphatically; “certainty would be better; and candour and openness must be the safest, because the truest path. She should have let you speak.”

“I don’t know, though,” resumed Maurice, with a strong dislike to hear even an implied censure on his idol, “she must be the best judge of that; the evils, the pain of coldness and displeasure would have all fallen on her. She would have been the sufferer. It was natural she should shrink from the disclosure, it would

cost her too dear ! If I could only have borne all for her !”

“ I cannot imagine that she would have met with anything half so bad as the trouble of concealment, and the pain of mystery. Mr. Barham might not approve your attachment, and then he would have separated you, sent her away, or something of that sort ; but that is no more than has now happened. The dictates of honour are as imperative as the commands of the sternest parent : if he had refused his consent, you must have given up all hope, and you might both trust to recovering in time from an unfortunate love.”

“ Hilary, you don’t know ! Love like mine lasts for life,” was his determined answer.

“ But perhaps it might not with her ; and you know you must really wish her to be happy. If she had no hope, she would gradually recover her serenity ; at least, I think one must, if hope were really gone ; but now she will not only have the sickening misery of protracted suspense,

but the fear of discovery, and the pain of acting a part—of in appearance deceiving her father.”

“Deceiving ! how unjust you are ; she is incapable of deceit.”

“I only said the appearance, dear Maurice ; but why should she fear to own her love ? You are not unworthy of it—noble birth indeed, you have not ; but except that and money, you have every thing a man can want ! Education, profession—why, Maurice, your profession has been followed by a king ! Person, manners, temper, principles—oh, what could Mr. Barham ask better ; and you have no low connections, nothing to shock aristocratic prejudices ; the son of a gentleman—and of an old, good family ! why should Dora fear to own you, to acknowledge her love ? A love returned, confessed as yours is ; and Mr. Barham never prevented your being together. Dora has been allowed to come here as she pleased. Surely she must be mistaken in her judgment on this occasion.”

“I wish you could persuade her so.”

“I will try, when I can see her,” said Hilary.

“But it must be before I go, dear,” returned Maurice, eagerly; “if I am ordered off, and have to leave this unexplained, it would be base and cowardly then to throw all the burden and pain on her alone. I could not do that!”

“I think even then, at any rate, it would be right to avow it all, and let the consequences follow as they might. Every week’s delay must add to the evil.”

“If you could but see her, Hilary! but she will not come here, I know. Where could you meet her? Could you go to the Abbey?”

“How, dear Maurice? I have no means,” said Hilary.

“Perhaps Mrs. Paine could take you over, or Miss Fielding. If you could contrive it! do think about some way of meeting!”

Eager to fulfil her brother’s wishes, Hilary turned her mind entirely to the means of their accomplishment; and in her self-devotion to his interest, contrived to forget, in a great degree,

her own feelings of suspense and anxiety. She would not indulge in contemplation, she would not listen to the whispers of hope, or to the cold insinuations of fear and doubt. She put away all retrospective glances, and stilled her mind with a calm, but fixed, resolution, to wait in patience, and trust for the future, whatever its result might be.

She sent a note to Mrs. Paine to ask if she could drive her over to the Abbey the next day ; saying, that having heard from Isabel that Dora was suffering, and likely soon to leave home, she was very desirous of seeing her. Maurice carried the note, eager to do something, and finding action less painful than quiet and thought. But the owners of Primrose Bank were out when he arrived there ; and after wandering for some time in the vicinity, in hopes of meeting them, Maurice was obliged to return home without a reply.

It was about twelve the next day, as the family at the Vicarage were sitting together,

that the carriage from 'the Ferns' drove up. Much to Miss Duncan's relief, she saw at a glance that there were only the two ladies in it; and in a few minutes Mrs. Fielding and her daughter were in the parlour; the one as full of kindness, and the other of energy and gaiety, as usual. They were delighted to find Hilary so much improved. As well as ever, they said, no trace of languor or paleness visible. This was true; for the sight of them excited her, and they could not tell that the pink hue in her cheeks, and her apparent self-possession and activity, were the result of high-wrought, but concealed, feelings of suffering anxiety. Victoria's object was to take her out for a drive; Mrs. Fielding's to remain with Mr. Duncan, whilst his eldest daughter was away.

No answer had come from Mrs. Paine; Hilary saw Maurice look at her with imploring eyes; and although hardly liking to ask the favour of Victoria, she was strongly tempted to beg at once to be driven over to the Abbey.

It was, however, by no means improbable, that any minute might bring the answer from Mrs. Paine, and until that arrived, she could decide on nothing. She could only explain to Victoria how far she was pre-engaged; and whilst doing so, Mr. Paine himself walked in, bringing an excuse from his wife. She was not well, and the pony-carriage had met with an accident; but if to-morrow would do, it should be at her service. To-morrow, Hilary thought, might be too late: Maurice was in an agony of impatience, Victoria was urgent and persuasive, and she herself, afraid of yielding to selfish feelings, and sacrificing her brother's happiness to her own scruples, gave way at length to the united influence of her companions, and prepared to accompany Miss Fielding.

Certain thoughts as to what Captain Hepburn would think, if he knew she was driving in Mr. Huyton's carriage, were put away as intrusive and selfish; there was no occasion to connect the latter at all with the act, the obli-

gation was conferred by Victoria alone, and need concern no one else; and as she hoped to be of use to Maurice, there was every excuse for taking her present step.

CHAPTER IV.

“ She moves slow ; her voice alone
Has yet an infantine and silver tone.
But even that comes languidly ; in truth,
She seems one dying in the mask of youth.”

ISEULT OF BRITTANY.

HARDLY had the carriage driven from the door, when Hilary had reason to repent of having yielded.

“ I shall go home first, if it is the same to you,” said her companion, calmly ; “ on several accounts ; one of which is, that you must not go without your dinner, and we shall be sure to find luncheon ready when we get there.”

Hilary remonstrated, and assured her she should have no appetite ; and she did not wish

her to go out of the way on that account. But Victoria was one of those gaily-selfish and cheerfully-obstinate individuals, who are never really turned out of their way, or persuaded out of their opinion. She listened with a smile to Hilary's remonstrances, and agreed to her remarks, but never in the smallest point altered her mind or her conduct. To 'the Ferns' she meant to go, and accordingly to 'the Ferns' they went; avowedly for Hilary's comfort, actually for Miss Fielding's pleasure. On first reaching it the master was invisible, and Hilary, for a few minutes, entertained the hope, that though thus forced against her will into his house, she should escape meeting him: but this hope soon proved vain, for presently he entered; and not only did his tone and manner in addressing her speak of the feelings she did not wish to encourage, but they evinced so entire an absence of surprise at her visit, as made her unavoidably suspect that the whole had been a scheme between the cousins to entrap her into

coming there with or without her will. This was confirmed by the fact of his bringing in with him a basket of most beautiful flowers, which he began arranging as he sat by her, observing, as he did so, that he wished to replace the bouquet she had lost the day of her accident.

What a world of thoughts rushed through her memory at those words, and dyed her cheeks with hot crimson blushes. How Charles interpreted her confusion, she did not know ; her ideas flew off to another person ; there was another voice ringing in her ears ; a voice which petitioned, in never-forgotten whispers, for one violet ; and then she wondered, as she had often done before, not only what had become of those flowers themselves, but of the feelings they had seemed to express, and the hopes they had awakened ; had that bunch of violets sunk, where she had so narrowly escaped, and were they to be the type, the emblem of the fate which would attend her own shy affections, and shrinking, undeveloped expectations ?

“You do not know,” continued Charles, after watching her downcast eyelids and flitting colour for some minutes, “that I saw the remains of that bunch of flowers, scattered, soiled, withered, floating on the water two days afterwards. I tried to secure the peristeria, which I should have valued for the associations connected with it. It was near the bank, and I could see one snowy dove, sitting on her little nest, unsoiled and peaceful. I tried to grasp it; but I failed, and not only plunged my own feet into a treacherous hole, from which I had some difficulty in escaping, but pushed the flower itself under water, and it did not rise again!”

“It was hardly worth the risk,” said Hilary; “you, who have so many fair flowers in your own houses, should have allowed those which accident had scattered on the water to float on, until they became the prize of a less wealthy individual.”

“Had they been mine still, or rather, had they never had another owner, been pressed by

another hand, I might have done so, Miss Duncan," was his significant answer.

"I still think it was not worth the risk," replied Hilary, quietly ; "but we are told that we may learn lessons from every thing, and certainly life is full of emblems, if we do but read them right."

"I know how fanciful you are, Miss Duncan," replied he, in a lighter tone ; "what moral would you deduce from this incident for my benefit?"

She hesitated a little ; seeing which, he added more gravely, "Nay, do tell me ; since I lost the flower I coveted, let me profit by the loss in some way ; do not let that pretty dove-blossom have sunk uselessly beneath the waters ; tell me of what it is the emblem !"

"No, excuse me," replied Hilary, seriously, "I cannot undertake to give lessons in morality to you." And then, turning away decidedly, she raised her voice to address Victoria, who was just reading a note, which she had found waiting for her on her return.

Perhaps Miss Fielding did not think the countenances of the other two indicated that their conversation could be prolonged with benefit to themselves ; for she came forward almost immediately, and suggesting that luncheon must be ready, led the way to the dining-room.

The carriage was ordered round, as soon as the meal was concluded, and Hilary, who had been on a mental rack, whilst obliged to undergo the pointed civilities, and the overpowering assiduities of both cousins, began to breathe more freely, in the hope of escaping to a more genial atmosphere, and putting a continually increasing space between the soft voice and half-reproachful dark eyes which now followed her so tenderly.

It had required all her self-command, and her regard to duty rather than impulse, to avoid shewing in her manner how exceedingly she had been annoyed by what had passed, or how entirely she was at ' the Ferns ' against her will. Her sense of what was due to herself, as well as her hosts, had compelled her to be courteous,

and the recollection of what she owed to Charles Huyton, increased her resolution to endure. Victoria knew she had come unwillingly; she could assure Mr. Huyton of the fact; and now she hoped the penance would soon be over, and the painful struggle between gratitude and dislike, or something very near it, might be put away at least for a time.

Greatly, therefore, was her annoyance increased, when she heard Charles say, that having some papers to take to Mr. Barham, he should accompany them, and would order his horse at the same time.

“Do so, by all means,” remarked Victoria, “if you prefer riding; but otherwise, you know, you could just as well come with us in the carriage. However, perhaps you like being independent.”

“What does Miss Duncan say?” said Charles, looking at her.

“Miss Duncan can have no choice,” replied Hilary, trying to look indifferent; “since both

carriage and horses belong to Mr. Huyton, no one can dictate to him which he shall use."

"But perhaps you have secrets to discuss with Victoria," said he, playfully, "and then I should be sadly in the way. Is not that the case?"

"No, I have no secrets with her!"

"Then, since the right of choice is mine, and you will say nothing to direct me, I choose your company, ladies; and if I choose wrong^{ly}, the consequences be on you, who refused me your advice and counsel."

Hilary wished she had only had the courage to say that he had better ride!

The drive to the Abbey would have been pleasant after all, could she have forgotten both the past and the future. Mr. Huyton was not disagreeable; on the contrary, he was once more in one of those moods which made her doubt whether her former fears had not been the mere illusions of vanity. Kind and just quietly attentive to her, to Victoria he devoted all his gallantry, and pretty nearly all his conversation.

They were both in good spirits, and without being particularly clever or witty, they were exceedingly amusing and pleasant. But the painful uncertainty which these abrupt variations of manner occasioned, was not to be allayed by an hour's calm, or by a temporary remission of his attentions. She was uneasy and anxious still, doubting the wisdom of her own decision in accepting Victoria's invitations, and only succeeding in putting away harassing and useless perplexities, that they might give place to other feelings at least as painful. Dora and Maurice ! their difficulties and distresses were too real and too new not to deserve undivided attention, and she felt as if she were even unkindly selfish, as she reverted to them, in having allowed thoughts for herself to occupy her mind.

Fast as the four horses swept along, they hardly went quick enough for her impatience at last, when she remembered the grief and anxiety from which her brother was suffering at home. She tried to still herself, and be patient and

quiet, knowing well that eagerness and impetuosity were not the qualities wanted on this occasion to carry her point. But, with all her efforts, every nerve was thrilling, and every pulse seemed beating through her frame, as they drove up to the Abbey ; and engrossed in her own thoughts now, far away from recollections of herself, she was unconscious of her abstracted and very pensive air, and quite unaware of the glances cast on her, and the meaning looks interchanged by her companions.

Charles and Victoria were very far, indeed, from guessing what was the subject which occupied her mind ; as far as Hilary herself was from supposing that they attributed her nervous and uneasy expression to pique at his manner, or jealousy of Miss Fielding.

He left them in the hall, to go to Mr. Barham's library, whilst the young ladies were shown into Isabel's morning-room, where she and Lady Margaret were sitting together. Miss Barham's reception was a very warm one ; she

was delighted to find Hilary was equal to the exertion, and for some minutes her delight prevented her taking any real notice of how unwell her friend appeared. The paleness of her cheeks, and anxiety of her manner, did at last strike Isabel ; and Hilary, who had been nervously waiting for a pause, in which she might find time to enquire for Dora, was prevented from doing it at all by an exclamation,—

“After all, you look very tired and exhausted, Hilary dear ; I shall forbid you mixing in conversation, and insist on quiet and repose for you. Suppose you were to go to Dora’s room. It would not excite you too much, and you do not look as if you would overwhelm her.”

Hilary gladly assented, and after telling Victoria to send for her when she was ready to go, she followed Isabel from the saloon. In her pleasant dressing-room, with windows open and jalousies closed, making a cool and grateful twilight, Dora was stretched listlessly on a sofa ; her beautiful long hair all tumbled about

her pretty face, and her whole appearance, and even her attitude, betokening a restless and miserable impatience. Isabel had put Hilary in at the door without speaking, and then herself retreated; and, on hearing a noise, poor Dora did not raise her head, but only asked who was there. Her friend did not answer, advancing gently to the sofa, but uncertain how to announce herself. Dora then removed the hand which covered her weary eyes, and raised her head. With one little shriek of satisfaction, up she sprang, and Hilary was clasped in her arms, with warm kisses rained on her cheeks and lips, and tender embraces, and choking sobs, and smiling, tearful words of endearment and welcome, and blushes which ran up quick and hot to her temples, and even dyed her finger tips with pink, so deep they were.

Poor Dora! hers was the sorrow and the emotion of a child.

They sat down together on the sofa; Dora with her arm round Hilary's waist, and nestling

in close to her, as if there she might find peace, or at least support.

“How are you all at home, Hilary? and who is there?” were her first coherent words, and down went her looks upon the carpet, and up came, redder than ever, the blushes to her cheeks.

“Well—all well—and Maurice has not left us yet!”

There was a little start, and the fingers which held Hilary’s hand were pressed more closely than before; there was a fluttered pause, and then the trembling girl said,—

“Do you know, Hilary?—has he told you?”—and the eyes asked even more eloquently than the words.

“Yes, Dora, he has. I came here on that account.”

Dora threw herself upon her companion’s neck. “Good, dear, sweet Hilary! what do you think of me? are you shocked? oh, don’t say I am wicked to love him. Is it, can it be

wrong? I could not help it, Hilary; indeed, I could not!"

"Do you think *I* could blame you for loving my brother?" said Hilary, tenderly.

"Ah, dearest Hilary! how good you are. Then you do not think me wrong; oh, what a comfort. If *you* say I am right, then I feel sure indeed that I am."

Miss Duncan's eyes were cast down, and there came a graver expression over her face, which Dora immediately remarked.

"What is it, Hilary?" eagerly inquired she; "what is wrong? Why do you look so? If you do not blame me for loving Maurice, what do you mean?"

"It is not for loving Maurice," replied Hilary, hesitating, and pressing Dora's fingers closer. Their eyes met, and then bursting into a passion of tears, Dora once more hid her face; but this time it was with her hands, away from her friend, and she faltered out, between her passionate sobs, "I know—I know—but oh, Hilary! I

dare not—*dare* not ! You do not know what I should have to bear. I knew, I thought you would say this—but I cannot—cannot.”

Hilary again kissed and soothed her, and spoke soft words of sisterly tenderness, and did not try to argue or persuade, until Dora's own vehemence exhausted itself, and she became calm. Then Hilary spoke of openness and truth, firmness and endurance, and tried to show her that there was no hope but in candour ; and to convince her that her cowardice was wearing out her own feelings, and throwing away the happiness of one she said she loved so well. And her father, too ! how could she reconcile her conduct with her duty to him ? and how could he bear it, when he learnt that his young daughter had given away her affections to one she dared not own—had done what she was ashamed to acknowledge—had listened willingly to words she blushed that he should hear ? could this be right ?

Dora threw herself upon the sofa, burying

her face in the cushions, and lay there in powerless grief, her very attitude and air telling of the prostration of her mind, of her entire helplessness and irresolution.

“ Oh, if I could—if I dared—if I were you—had your strength, Hilary—but you do not know what coldness and unkindness are—you never felt my father’s frown. Any thing but that I could bear. I could die for Maurice—I shall die for him, I know. I do not wish to live without him ; but I dare not tell myself—I dare not own it all.”

“ Then are you quite resolved, Dora, to conquer your affection—to give him up entirely ? You can never see him again ; and, I may tell him you have determined on this course—that you sincerely renounce his love, and bid him forget you if he can.”

“ No, no ! cruel Hilary, don’t talk so ! in all my grief, to know he loves me, is my only comfort : give it up indeed ! but he will not—he cannot—he never can forget me.”

“Nay, Dora, for both your sakes he must, and he will, too; Maurice will do his duty at any hazard, and the love he may not own, he will not nourish. He would endure any thing for you, and your good; and even that, the greatest suffering of all, the crushing of all hope, the renunciation of all claim on you, the extinction of his affection, he will bravely battle for, because he knows that all this is better for you; more truly, lastingly good for you, than the growth of a secret, a clandestine, and, therefore, a disgraceful attachment. He will fight, and he will conquer, too; though the victory may be won only by the sacrifice of youth’s brightest, dearest hopes.”

Dora’s sobs were her only answer.

“He loves you better than you love him, Dora,” continued Hilary. “He would do and suffer anything rather than renounce you, except what he knows to be wrong.”

“Then he will never speak of giving me up,” said Dora, with decision.

“He will never seek to see you again, until your father knows all,” said Hilary, firmly. “Never—he said so ; and why, dear Dora, why not speak ?” added she again, in tones of most winning tenderness ; “you can have no other hope.”

“Then I can have none ! for my father’s anger I will not brave. Maurice I shall love to my dying day ; but if he will leave me, and will never see me more, be it so ; if he would only wait—only trust for the future, something might arise, some sudden turn or change ; but if he is impatient, let him go.”

It was no use arguing with Dora ; she felt she was wrong, but she would not dare to do right ; nor was it till with tearful eyes and trembling lips, that Hilary attempted to say farewell, that her temporary indignation died away, or she softened into regret. But when she saw her friend’s deep, unspoken emotion, pride again was banished by tenderness, and springing up, she clasped her arms round Hilary’s waist, and faltered out a loving, sad adieu.

“ Yes, tell Maurice I am entirely unworthy of him—tell him to forget me—but for me, I will lie down and think of him for ever. My heart is crushed, broken, Hilary ; and to part from you, the last tie to him—it is agony. I am going away very soon. They think change will do me good : well, well, I do not care. Leave me now, Hilary.”

And the little weeping, petulant beauty threw herself once more upon her couch. Hilary lingered still, and then Dora, looking up, said,—

“ You blame me, I know, but do you think I shall be happier than he ? Will wealth, or jewels, or the empty pleasures heaped on me, or the whispered nonsense of those who seek my fortune, or the idle life I lead, will all those make my heart lighter ? Compare our fates, and tell me which is most to be pitied. I know, though mine may be bright to look at, it will be all sorrow and misery within.”

“ But Dora, dearest Dora, why must this be ? All this misery might be spared if you would

but speak, or let Maurice speak. There need be no hidden grief then, and even if your father disapproved, (which he might not,) at least you would have done right, and then trustful patience, and resignation, and brighter hopes might come again. And peace can only be won by walking straight on to it. Believe me, Dora, you can have none unless you take this course."

"Go, go," cried Dora, impatiently; and Hilary, hoping that her absence might do what her presence had failed to effect, prepared to withdraw. She met Miss Barham's French maid at the door, who informed her that Mademoiselle Fielding desired her not to hurry, but she was quite ready to go; whereupon Miss Duncan immediately descended.

Charles Huyton and Mr. Barham were in the room, but she soon discovered that the former was engaged to stay and dine at the Abbey, and Victoria, evidently weary of her visit, was pleasantly bent on hurrying away. Hilary left Mr. Huyton apparently in earnest

conversation with Isabel, though, to own the truth, the conversation was all supplied by the young lady; but this, Miss Duncan did not remain to notice; and it was a satisfaction that they were spared his company on their return to Hurstdene. Victoria announcing that her friend was too tired to talk, desired her, laughingly, to be silent, on pain of her high displeasure; and herself taking up a book, their return home was accomplished with scarcely another sentence uttered by either.

Weary and dispirited Hilary was in the extreme; she had over-tasked her body, over-excited her mind, and had failed of securing the object which alone had tempted her to set aside her own feelings, and do what she so very much disliked. Now that disappointment was added to weakness and fatigue, she was inclined to take a most unfavourable view of her own conduct, and to doubt whether even success would have justified her in her own eyes, in the step she had taken. At all events, she resolved that

nothing but absolute necessity should induce her in future to incur any obligation to either of the cousins; and whatever their wishes or motives might be, she determined that her own rule must, for the future, be strict, and invariable. She would neither be betrayed nor tricked into giving the appearance of encouragement to one she never could love.

A shake of the head, and a little glance of concern, was her first intimation to Maurice of her want of success; nor was there time or opportunity for more definite explanation, until late in the evening. When the rest of the family had retired, Maurice drew a large chair towards the moon-lit window, and placing Hilary there, he sat down beside her, and silently kissed her cheek. She laid her head upon her shoulder, and the pent-up feelings which had been struggling all the evening for expression, found a channel in a shower of tears.

Silently the sister wept, and silently the brother smoothed her hair, and kissed her fore-

head, and clasped her closer and closer to him. She was the first to speak.

“Oh ! Maurice, I could do nothing, I am so sorry.”

“Did you see her ?” was his first question.

She repeated, as far as she could, the particulars of her visit, whilst he, drawing a little away from her, leant his head on his hand, and so concealed his face in the deep shadow which the fingers made in the moonbeams. She could not read the expression of pain, of disappointment on his eyes ; he did not mean she should—she had suffered enough for him without that ; but she *knew* what he was feeling, by the innate sympathy which love and experience give, and she grieved afresh. He was silent for a while, when she ceased speaking, and they sat together that calm summer night, as still and grave as two carved figures, except when the soft night breeze, blowing through the open window, rustled in her dress, or lifted the long brown curl from her neck.

“ Oh, Hilary ! why did I ever know her ? ” was at last his exclamation. “ Only to make her unhappy ? dear, darling Dora ! ”

“ And what will be the end ? ” whispered Hilary ; “ what will you do ? ”

“ Hope ! hope ! hope ! love on and love ever, whilst she remains single. We may not meet, but who knows what patience, perseverance, time, love, constancy, fortune may do ! who can foresee what may happen ? No, I will never despair, while there is room to hope ! ”

“ Dear Maurice ! ” was at once her most eloquent and consolatory interjection.

“ And, Hilary, if I sacrifice love to duty, if I deny myself now every opportunity of intercourse, every gratification of my affection until I may ask it fairly, honourably, justly, surely I may hope for brighter and better times. Only if Dora did not suffer ! ”

He fell into a reverie, which he ended by abruptly exclaiming,

“ You do not love Charles Huyton, Hilary ?”

“ No, and never shall. Would you wish it, Maurice ?”

“ I don’t know : no, I think not, I would rather—”

“ What ?” exclaimed she, looking eagerly at him.

“ Never mind !”

“ What makes you talk of it, Maurice ?” said she, after a moment’s reflection.

“ He told me himself, the day of your accident ; he spoke then of his love for you. I wondered I had never seen it before ; but I had fancied him engaged to Miss Fielding. It is natural he should love, more than that you should not. Are you sure of that ?”

“ Perfectly so, and so is he. If he persists in loving me, it is at his own cost ; it never will be returned. I have long wished him to give it up ; and like you, once thought it was going away. Till Sunday, I believed him engaged to Victoria ! Did he really tell you he had not changed ?”

“Yes, and he was most emphatic in his expressions !” replied Maurice.

“I am sure Mr. Barham wishes him for a son-in-law ; and Isabel would suit him so perfectly. I wish he would think so too,” continued Hilary, speaking slowly and thoughtfully. “I wish he would ; I should be so glad.”

“And do you still mean never to marry, Hilary ?” said her brother, turning and looking gravely in her eyes. “Do you keep unchanged ?”

“Leave the future, Maurice,” was her quiet answer. “I never mean to marry Mr. Huyton, nor will I leave my father for any man now living.”

The brother and sister parted for the night, after lingering long ; for Hilary, tired as she was, could scarcely bear to shorten the few hours which they might yet have to spend together.

And the morrow’s post brought the dreaded, the expected change ; the summons to duty, which, for his sake, Hilary welcomed with a

smile, a cheerful tone, an energetic kindness. But when the parting was over, all her strength gave way, physical weakness asserted its supremacy, and she was forced to allow depression and pain to take their course. She could not raise her head from the sofa all that day, and when Charles Huyton called, she was too ill to see him. There was some comfort in that ; it partly paid her for her nervous languor, for her aching head, and fevered frame ; she was able to be invisible, without a fear of ingratitude.

The strong stimulus withdrawn, the occupation ended, the anxious suspense for Maurice terminated, her own thoughts would turn to her own affairs. It was a week, only a week, since the memorable Thursday, the day when she had last seen Captain Hepburn ; how long it seemed : double that time, at least. She had to tell herself it was only a week, to suppress the rising impatience, to quell the incipient murmur. Duty with him must be first ; public before private duty ; patriotism before feeling ; honour

before love ; his country before his friends. This she knew right well ; and she ought not to feel herself neglected, or to fear herself forgotten, merely because a week had passed without direct intercourse. No, not if vanity did not mislead her, not if she had understood him rightly, and read his character correctly. He did love her ! that she believed, but there were other doubts more harassing than to doubt his love. Her present torment was to doubt what her duty should be.

Had she not resolved, promised, bound herself to sacrifice her whole time, care, and affection to her father and sisters ? this had been her most solemn determination. How had she kept it ? By yielding to the first impulse of affection ; by allowing her mind, her fancy, and her feelings to be engrossed by another ; by one who, a fortnight ago, was an entire stranger to her : by one who had never told her that he loved her ; by one whose professional duties might make an engagement to him, even if he offered it, incompatible with her own domestic

ties. What was she wishing to do? where were her resolutions, her promises, her intentions of self-devotion and self-forgetfulness? Forgotten at the very moment they were put to the test! Thoughts such as these, self-torturing and reproachful thoughts, were not of a nature to still her throbbing pulses, or cool her aching brow: they were hardly more medicinal than the hot tears which the parting with her brother cost her.

Her sisters watched her with affectionate care, and forced her to take such bodily repose as her actual weakness required; playfully declaring, if she attempted to exert herself again, they would tell her father of her pale cheeks and heavy eyes: so she felt it her duty to lie still, although stillness of mind was for some time quite unattainable.

But quiet and repose brought strength of body, and with it came back more command of her spirit also. She saw her way, she understood her duty, and right well she knew that

duty was truly the safest, smoothest path that she could tread. To put away thoughts of the past, to bend her attention to her domestic cares, to control her memory and curb her fancy, this she resolved, Heaven helping her, to do. Could she not? yes; the events of the last ten days had not surely robbed her of the mastery of her mind. She could govern it still! What else had she been learning all her life? and should she now give up the attempt because the task was less easy than heretofore? should the charioteer drop the reins because the road was narrow and rough; or the pilot abandon the helm, just when the vessel came amidst the shoals and breakers?

So argued Hilary: and if the expectation of a happy result, as men say it does, aids greatly in the performance of a difficult task, that, perhaps, was one source of the success which now attended her efforts.

Her strength slowly returned, her equanimity came with it, and although she was somewhat

paler and more languid than formerly, although she still had struggles against depression, and fits of painful recollection, they were not apparent to her companions, who only saw that she was more easily tired than formerly, rather more silent, and a good deal excited when Maurice's letters arrived.

It was a very quiet week which followed. The Barhams left the Abbey, the master of 'the Ferns' also was absent. He had accompanied his aunt and cousin to London, from whence, Victoria told Sybil when she called to take leave, the ladies were going on to the seaside perhaps, or possibly to the north of England, and it was by no means unlikely that Charles would go with them.

Hilary did not see any of them again before they left; but when she was certain that event had taken place, she felt an unspeakable relief come over her, which made her other troubles seem easier to bear.

She was able now to leave her room, and

stroll about the garden, wander on the green, or rest on her favourite seat by the chancel-window, without fear of meeting any one whom she would rather avoid. The calm summer air under the shady trees always did her good ; and an afternoon spent in solitary reflection, or in quiet, half-cheerful, half-grave, chat with her father, was a mental tonic, which never lost its power.

The liveliness of the family party depended on the younger ones ; they were untamed by sorrow yet, and soon recovered parting from Maurice. To their view, life was like the beautiful vistas in their own wild forest, across which the sloping sunbeams played between the shady trees, turning all they touched to gold.

CHAPTER V.

“ You ‘ never loved me ! ’ — No you never knew —
You with youth’s dew yet glittering on your soul —
What ’ tis to *love*. Slow, drop by drop, to pour
Our life’s whole essence perfumed through and
through,
With all the best we have, or can control,
For the libation ! cast it down before
Your feet, — then lift the goblet dry for evermore ! ”

ANONYMOUS.

ONE afternoon, Mr. Duncan and two of his daughters had gone over to Primrose Bank, Hilary being left with only Nest as her companion. The child had been reading to her sister until she was tired, and then leaving her to reflection and silence on the green bank of the terrace, she strayed away to the garden-

gate. She looked across the green, with no very particular expectation of seeing any object worth her attention, but with a vague, childish curiosity, which was always prepared for a marvel or a pleasure. She saw some one approaching; a gentleman, a tall man; perhaps it was Mr. Huyton, perhaps Mr. Paine, or maybe, thought she, it is Maurice: she was too young to consider probabilities, or understand the troublesome restraints of propriety and decorum; and too well known, and too much petted generally in the parish, to have any fear of a repulse, or dread of a rebuff. The gate was unlatched; out she ran, and skipped across the turf to meet the individual in question. After advancing a hundred yards, however, she saw that she was mistaken; Maurice it was not: no, nor Mr. Huyton—it was a fuller figure, a firmer step; she slackened her pace one minute, and shading her eyes with her hand, looked at him attentively. It was!—yes—it was one of whom her sisters had spoken much! one to

whom her father had told her she owed her life; one whose name had been joined with those of her own family in her prayers for blessings on his head. It was Captain Hepburn himself! She rushed on joyfully; and breathless with her race, eager, excited, with flashing eyes and crimson cheeks, she reached him, caught his outstretched hand in her little fat fingers, and covered it with grateful kisses.

“Dear Nest!” said he, raising the child in his arms, and looking at her glittering eyes, “how are you? how are your sisters—all?”

“Oh! Captain Hepburn, I am so glad to see you; now I can thank you,” was her only reply: and she threw her arms round his neck and laid her cheek close to his.

“For what, dear child?” said he. His thoughts were of Hilary, and he hardly remembered that Nest had anything to be grateful for.

“For picking me out of that horrid black water,” said she, in a whisper. “I have so wanted

to see you since ; but you know you went away without saying good-bye to me or Hilary."

"Do you remember that day, Nest?" said he, walking slowly on, with her in his arms.

"Oh, yes ! so well ; my slipping down, and the bubbling water, and the cold, and the choking feeling here in my throat and head, and such a pain, oh, dear ! I dream sometimes now, at night, of the bank and the gurgle of the waves, and wake with such a start. I did not like to wash my face for some days afterwards. But is it not odd, Captain Hepburn ?—I can remember nothing about you taking me out. I should not have known you did, if they had not told me so !"

"Who told you ?"

"Papa and the others !"

"Hilary ?"

"No," replied Nest, gravely ; "they will not let me talk to her about it. Sybil told me not ; and she never has spoken about it at all, since she has been ill."

"She is well now ?" said he, enquiringly.

“Better, but not well. She cannot walk much. She is in the garden.”

“Will she see me, do you think?” said he, stopping at the porch, and setting Nest on one of the benches.

“I don’t know,” replied the little girl, gravely. “She has seen nobody but Mr. Paine, for days. She could not see Mr. Huyton, when he came last, though he sent me to ask her; and you know he pulled her out of the water, as you did me. She said she was too ill.”

“But she is better now,” said he, earnestly; “perhaps she will not mind me. Is your papa in?”

“No, only Hilary, and she is in the garden. I will go and ask her, if you like; or you come, and she must see you then.”

He hardly thought such a surprise desirable, and suggested that Nest should go on first. But Hilary, who had missed her sister, had risen to look for her, and met the child the moment after she turned the corner of the house; so

that the gentleman had the opportunity of ascertaining that he might, so far as an abrupt introduction was concerned, almost as well have presented himself at first.

“ Oh, Hilary! will you see Captain Hepburn ?” was her exclamation.

“ Nest, what do you mean ?” he heard in a hurried, fluttered accent, and he was sure she had stopped short in her approach.

“ Don’t be pale, Hilary—don’t be frightened,” said Nest, coaxingly. “ You have not seen him since that horrid day, I know ; and when I saw him, it made me remember all, and made me feel funny, I do not know how ; but it goes off, and now I am only glad.”

“ But, Nest,” he heard her saying, and there was a catching in her voice, which, to his anxious ear, told of a struggle with excitement and surprise, perhaps of deeper feeling too ; “ have you seen him ?”

He could stand still no longer. Advancing from the porch, he met her on the lawn. She

was stooping over her sister when he turned the corner of the house, but she raised her head at the sound of his feet, and stood still. She really could not take one step towards him ; and had not her hand rested on little Nest's shoulder, perhaps she could hardly even have stood at all. There was a beating at her heart, a throbbing in every pulse, which seemed to suffocate her ; there was a mist and confusion before her eyes, which, for a moment, blended sky and earth, trees, shadows, and Captain Hepburn, in one wavering cloud of darkness. She had no thought or feeling, except a wish to stand upright, and a sensation that to speak was impossible. How they met, she did not know. The warm clasp of his hand on hers, was the first thing of which she was quite aware ; he was by her, he was looking at her, but he was silent as herself.

The first words he spoke were not those of greeting, but as if they formed a part of a long preceding conversation, and in a tone that implied a whole world of tenderness and anxiety.

“Come in now, and sit down : I grieve to see you are still so weak !”

He drew her hand within his arm, and led her towards the porch, whilst she revived to the comforting conclusion, that perhaps he thought her agitation was the effect alone of bodily, not mental weakness. She yielded to his guidance, wishing heartily that she could speak, but doubting her power too much to make the effort.

When he saw her safe in a large easy-chair, he sat down by her, and said, in a quiet voice :

“I left Maurice quite well, yesterday, very busy and enthusiastic about his ship.”

“Happy too,” ejaculated Hilary, her thoughts instantly reverting to her brother’s cares and troubles, and forgetting at once all her own embarrassments. “How are his spirits?”

“Variable, perhaps ; at least, I fancied so, when he was not actually employed ; but better than at first.”

She looked at him, anxious to try and ascertain what he knew or suspected of Maurice’s

feelings ; but meeting his grave, dark eyes, she was recalled to a recollection of herself and him ; she coloured again, hesitated, and broke off a half-uttered word abruptly.

He waited to allow her time to recover ; then finding she was silent, he said : “ Were you going to ask how long we should be fitting out ? I think in three weeks more we shall report ourselves ready for sea ! ”

The easiest thing for her to do, was to repeat his words, “ Three weeks ! ”

“ Come here, Nest,” said the Captain ; “ Maurice sent you his love, and a great many kisses. Shall I give them to you ? ”

“ Did Maurice give them to *you* first ? ” inquired Miss Nest, with a look half-coquettish, half-demure, and holding back from him.

Even Hilary smiled at the idea, but he went on.

“ He wants you to send him some of those double violets, which grow in your garden ; you are to put them in a letter, which is to go by post.”

“ I will go and gather some,” screamed she, in an ecstasy of delight at the idea, and darted away.

He turned to his other companion.

“ Do you remember ?” said he, bending a look on her she could not meet.

“ What ?” in a low trembling whisper, was all she could say.

“ These, and what preceded them !” and he drew out and opened a paper, and shewed her the contents.

She did remember ; she saw the withered flowers ; the white riband, tied in a peculiar knot ; they recalled all ; the whispered words, the gay festival, the alarm, the accident, the agony of fear, the rescue, and the parting look. Embarrassment and personal feeling were merged in one sentiment, stronger still, gratitude ! Clasp ing her hands, and raising to him a look of trustful earnest, tender gratitude, she exclaimed ; “ And I have never thanked you : let me now. Oh, Captain Hepburn ! you, who

risked your life for Nest and me, what do we not owe you?" Her tearful eyes said more, far more than her words.

"The risk was nothing," said he, hastily; "do not speak of that; and the prize was all that I hold dearest on earth!" He had said it at last; she had almost intuitively known what was coming, and she did know what must follow now. She gave him one shy glance, and then hiding her face upon her clasped hands, she tried to conceal the blushes which burnt upon her cheeks.

"Yes, Hilary, it is the truth! the world does not hold another object so dear to me as you. Are you displeased with me for saying so? For you, for your happiness, your welfare, your peace, there is not the thing which I would not dare or suffer myself; and to win your love! if I only knew how to do that!"—

He stopped and made a gentle effort to take her hand; it was yielded unresistingly; he ventured to draw a little nearer, and said: "Will you not give me one look, one word, at least, to

show me that you are not displeased with my presumption ?”

She looked up at him ; there was an earnest expression in his eyes, a deeply-anxious tone in his voice, a humility, a self-mistrust in his whole air and manner, which told that it was no set form of self-depreciating words without meaning, no assumption of suspense to conceal real assurance and hope ; he was at that moment truly suffering from struggling doubts and fears ; he was putting his happiness to the test, to win or lose it all.

The look she did give him was not discouraging : it was not likely to be, with her feelings. Fears as to the past, doubts for the future, present anxieties, weakness, uncertainty, were all swept away in the rush of gratified feelings and tender satisfaction. He loved her ; he, the good, the wise, the brave, the courageous man ; he who could deliberately and unflinchingly face danger, and confront death, not only in the tumult of excitement, amidst the plaudits of the multitude, but

also in the chamber of sickness, by the bed of infection, in the stillness of the hospital, where none but true courage or dull apathy could remain unmoved by fear ; he was now waiting, in trembling suspense, for her decision, and deprecating her displeasure with a humility he would hardly have shown to a monarch.

She saw the immense power which she had over him, and she saw it with delight. Not the delight of gratified vanity, the satisfaction of the coquette who rejoices in giving pain ; but the pleasure of a loving and grateful heart, exulting in the discovery that it has the means to confer happiness where it has felt deep obligation, and the gentle triumph of maiden modesty, at last assured that it has not bestowed affection unauthorised and unwished for.

She owed him her life, and her sister's also ; and she had that in her power which he said would repay the benefit. He had placed his happiness with his heart at her disposal, and she could reward the generous gift by a single word.

With an air of the most bewitching modesty and confidence, she raised her head, she held out both her hands, and said, "Captain Hepburn, you have made me very happy by the assurance of your love;" then fearing she had said too much, she would have drawn back, but she was not allowed; his thanks and raptures were too warm, too energetic to be interrupted.

"I could not leave England," he said, presently, "without explaining my mind, small as my hope of such an answer was; I trusted, that perhaps you would think of me, let me try to deserve you, let me endeavour to win your love. I feared that silence and absence might lead to misconstructions, might make you doubt my sincerity, blame and mistrust me. Believe me, I dared not flatter myself that you felt more than a friendly interest; what have I to tempt you, Hilary, that you should condescend to love me? It is only your own goodness, your sweetness, which inclines you to listen to me favour-

ably. If you knew me better, I fear you would value me less."

She shook her head a little, and with downcast eyes, and lips just parting into a smile, she said, "I do not *love* all those whom I have known much longer."

He knew it well; for he knew he had a rival, and she might almost have seen that he did so, had she been able to look at him.

"Hilary, I know you will be true to me, whilst I am at sea; I feel that I may trust you once and for ever; and when I return, you will become my wife."

"I will never leave my father, Captain Hepburn; I will form no engagement—plight no promise, which can in the least interfere with his comfort, or my attention to him. His claims first, and then yours may be considered. You think me right, do you not?" added she, anxiously, laying her hand on his arm, and looking up in his face, where she fancied she saw a shadow gather. On that question she felt all her happiness depended.

“Right, Hilary, in your estimation of your duty ; only wrong in your estimation of me. Do you think I would tempt you away ? or that I could look for happiness with you, if it was bought at the price of neglecting your first duty ? I hoped you knew me better.”

Her answer was to lay her head upon his shoulder, and whisper gently, “Had I thought so, you would not be what you are to me, Captain Hepburn. I trust you entirely ; and promise, one day, to be yours. When, we cannot tell.”

“And hear me, dearest, renew the vow I once made, never to ask you to give me your hand, unless our marriage can be compatible with your father’s comfort. I will wait—I will be patient—I will consider only your happiness and your peace. Since you have condescended to promise me your faith, I feel that no sacrifice on my part can be too great to repay you. It is so good of you to love me. I have no better home, no fortune, no worldly station, or importance to offer you. I have so little to tempt you.

Ardent, devoted love, and a share in an unblemished name, that is nearly all ; and if you condescend to accept this, shall I not agree to your terms, and consult your pleasure? Indeed, it seems to me such a wonder that you should love me, that I feel tempted to ask again, are you sure you do? What have I done to deserve such happiness?"

"Done! if I were not afraid of spoiling you by praise," replied Hilary, smiling, then stopping; she added, after a minute's pause, and in a tone of emotion, "done! who saved me, by saving Nest? who dared what others hesitated to do? do I not know you brave, and prompt, and energetic?—no, do not interrupt me, many *might* have done as much, perhaps; but who saved Maurice? whose watchful care preserved my brother? who sat by him when others feared infection, or shrank from the terrors of delirium? You may have known me only for a fortnight, I have known and valued you, Captain Hepburn, for many, many weeks—for months, indeed."

“It shall ever be my humble prayer, it shall be my most earnest endeavour, Hilary, not to disappoint your trusting love ; and Heaven helping me, I hope to repay it in kindness, in affection, in guarding you from evil all your life long.” He spoke very gravely ; he was much moved by her warmth. “Words are too poor to paint my gratitude to you for the honour you do me. And so they are to describe my implicit trust in your truth, your constancy, your prudence, and your affection. That I have to ask you to wait, that I am forced to leave you to the anxiety and trouble which I fear our separation may cause you, gives me great pain and grief for your sake ; I would gladly spare you every shadow of care, I would gladly devote my life to you from this time. I grieve, but I trust you entirely. Will you believe as fully in my constancy, as I do in yours, sweetest Hilary ?”

“Yes.”

That single word satisfied him completely.

When Nest came back from the garden, and

the clergyman and his daughter from Primrose Bank, they interrupted a very happy conversation ; one full of all the sweetness which confidence and affection, hope and gratitude, can inspire.

It may be easily believed that after this explanation Hilary recovered both strength and spirits with a rapidity which surprised and delighted her sisters and friends : it may be readily imagined, that young ladies of Sybil's and Gwyneth's ages entertained their own theories, and formed their own opinions, when they found Captain Hepburn once more at the Vicarage ; opinions and guesses which proved to have been surprisingly near the truth, when we consider their age and education. Mr. Huyton's acquaintance had existed so long, and his friendship had been so diffused in the family, that they had never thought of him as a suitor to their sister ; but, from the first, they had settled between themselves, that Captain Hepburn must fall in love with her. There was everything to

recommend such an arrangement in their eyes. He was grave and quiet, the nearest approach they could hope for to a mysterious and suspicious character ; whilst, on the contrary, Charles was so lively and talkative, that they could imagine neither concealment nor reserve in his case. Then, too, their favourite hero was comparatively poor, and had a profession which would be attended by possible danger as well as renown, would certainly occasion long absences, and might give rise to romantic incidents, doubts, distresses, and heroic difficulties. All this was a charming contrast with Charles Huyton's fortune and station in life ; who besides, as they thought, not caring for Hilary, could only, had he wished to marry her, have offered her a matter-of-fact, ready made, and every-day sort of home ; it would have been an engagement, presenting no difficulties except that of getting her wedding clothes properly made, and offering no romance, except their first meeting, now nearly forgotten.

Not that the girls wished their sister any harm, or had the slightest dislike to seeing her happy ; but at their age, the quiet monotony of a prosperous life seems dull in prospect, and they had no idea that misery and misfortune, anxiety, suspense, and sorrow were not the most pleasant accompaniments of life, when occasioned by sufficiently romantic and poetic causes. They did not know how reality strips suffering of romance, not only to the individual who grieves, but to the spectators who witness it : and that mourners who go about the daily affairs of life, hiding a broken heart under an outward calmness, may be extremely interesting to read of, but hardly excite so much actual sympathy and compassion, as one who has to walk through the world with a wooden leg.

But all this these two girls had yet to learn ; and in the meantime they were greatly rejoiced when they understood how rightly they had guessed, and learnt that the evident and marked devotion with which Captain Hepburn had

listened to Hilary, watched her footsteps, conversed with her, and finally saved her life (for they always gave him the whole credit of that adventure, and were, perhaps, for his sake, a little unjust to Charles), when they learnt that this was finally to be rewarded with her love and faith. In short, the engagement gave them perfect satisfaction.

Mr. Duncan was very well pleased ; yet he certainly would have preferred the richer *parti* : he liked Charles, perhaps, a little better than he did the other ; and there could be no doubt as to which, in common language, was the best match. If Hilary was happy, there was nothing more to be required ; but he would certainly have wished either that Captain Hepburn had been in Charles Huyton's place as regarded position, or that Charles Huyton had been the accepted suitor.

But if Hilary was happy, that was enough. And she was happy, exquisitely happy ; for the five days that her lover was able to remain, she

was as joyful and blithe as a bird. She recovered her health, of course ; she went about her daily tasks singing and smiling, making everybody near her partakers in her gaiety. She felt she had one to trust to now, on whom she should have a claim ; she looked forward with pleasure, and saw the future very bright. In the happy hours they spent together, she found one to whom she could express her past difficulties, her bygone sorrows and trials, one whose firmness strengthened, and whose tenderness comforted her. Oh ! what delightful seasons of confidence these were ; dearly prized at the time—more dearly still in memory.

Maurice had told his friend his troubles and sorrows ; so Hilary could discuss his prospects with her lover ; and though perhaps a little shocked at the depreciating view he took of Dora's conduct, the earnestness with which he hoped that Maurice would recover from his attachment, and the certainty with which he predicted that the lady would probably forsake

him, she would not have been a true woman had she not speedily adopted his opinions, and become a convert to his views even before she had quite done combatting them. One subject there was on which they did not touch; one topic on which Hilary, supposing him to be ignorant, herself preserved silence, and on which he, aware of her reserve, respected her feelings of delicacy too much to intrude.

The knowledge that Charles Huyton had been perseveringly repulsed, that wealth and station, abilities, personal charms, flattery and importunity, had failed to gain the heart which was now his own, was very sweet. If there is the man in the world whose pleasure in his own success would not be enhanced by such considerations, let him triumph in his conscious stoicism. I do not believe that there is: some might plume themselves on their own superior fascinations, some might rejoice in the lady's disinterested love; some might value themselves—some her the more for such knowledge,

but satisfaction of one kind or other, I imagine, every one would feel. For the present, however, Captain Hepburn concealed this source of satisfaction with as much scrupulous care as Hilary herself; and, but for an occurrence which even on this topic broke down their reserve, they would, probably, have parted when his leave of absence called him away, without any allusion to the matter.

Captain Hepburn had letters of business to write; and Hilary, taking advantage of the opportunity, set off to pay some visits in the village. The night had been stormy, but the morning was fair and bright, and Hilary, walking briskly, was soon at a cottage about half a mile on the road towards 'the Ferns,' whose inmates it was convenient for her to visit alone. The food, the clothes, and the advice all given, she was just issuing from the garden-gate when she was addressed by Charles, who, throwing himself from his horse, advanced quickly to greet her. She was surprised, for she had be-

lieved him still absent from the country ; and a mixture of other feelings, which his sight recalled, gave her an air of emotion, sensibility, and bashfulness, which he readily interpreted in the way most flattering to himself. Had he known whom she had left writing letters at her little table at home, he would perhaps have been as anxious to avoid the interview as herself ; but ignorant of what had passed since they last met, he very joyfully took his horse's reins upon his arm, and walked himself by her side. The usual form of questioning about friends and relations, recent occupations, his journey and his return, was gone through, and was followed by a silence of some duration. This was broken by Hilary, who, casting an anxious look at the clouds now gathering ominously overhead, observed, that she was afraid there was going to be a storm. She had hardly said the words when down came the rain in large drops, rapidly increasing in number every moment. There was a sawyer's pit at a short distance

with a shed beside it, and as this seemed the only shelter within reach, and the rain appeared likely to be violent, they quickly agreed to take refuge there ; hoping that the shower would be as brief as it was sudden. She was most anxious to get on home ; perhaps Captain Hepburn would have done work, and would miss her ; perhaps her father might want her. So she thought, as she stood for a minute or two at the entrance to the shed, looking wistfully up at the clouds, and watching those flitting gleams of brighter sky which occasionally seemed to promise a clearing up. Still the rain went on, and as drops began to penetrate through the slight roof where she stood, he said,

“ Come further in, Miss Duncan ; it will not clear the quicker for your watching ; and here is a nice block of wood, which will form a seat for you, where it is quite dry.”

The easiest thing to do was to comply ; she sat down accordingly, and he placed himself beside her. Then a sudden conviction came

over her that something was to follow ; and with a sort of desperate hope of stopping him, of avoiding a renewal of what was so painful, she began to talk of other things, the season, the harvest, the people, anything for a subject. He listened in silence ; his eyes were fixed on the open doorway ; he might have been counting the drops which fell from the eaves, so steadily did he gaze that way. Her ideas, unsupported by any help from him, necessarily came to an end ; and when she paused, it was his turn to speak.

“ Hilary, tell me, once more let me speak ; has my changeless devotion no influence on you ? ”

She shook her head.

“ None ! yet of late you have seemed to encourage me ; you have accepted—at least you have not repelled—my attentions ; you have allowed me to distinguish you as my first object ; you have permitted those advances from my family which were intended to show how they

would welcome you as one of themselves ; you have graced my *fête* with your presence ; your name has already been whispered round the neighbourhood as the object, as the recipient of my vows : has not all this given me a right to hope ; does all this go for nothing, for unmeaning form with you !”

“ I do not understand your language, Mr. Huyton,” replied Hilary in great surprise ; “ your tone and manner are alike new and unpleasant. May I ask you to drop this subject whilst we are compelled to remain together here !”

“ You would ask in vain : my happiness, my welfare in life, every hope here and hereafter is bound up in thoughts of you, in the wish to make you my wife !”

She tried to stop him as he spoke, but her gentle interruption was quite unheeded as he poured out his vehement declarations.

“ Why have you refused to see me, shut yourself up, and banished me from your house ? What

makes you, one so tender, loving, gentle as you, what makes you so hard, so unpersuadable to me? What have I done, that you will not love me? What is there in me, about me, belonging to me, that makes me disagreeable? And why this coquetry; at one time readily listening, calmly permitting, if not encouraging, my devotion, then denying me all interest, all concern; repulsing me entirely? Is this fair! just! right! Hilary? Do you think those who witnessed your peril, and your rescue, in my park, doubted the motives which nerved my arm, and warmed my heart? Do you think their plaudits were valued for anything besides the worth they might give me in your eyes? And, Hilary, is my reward to be ever the no! no! no! which dooms me to misery, despair, and heartless solitude?"

Mr. Huyton rose as he spoke, and stood before her in magnificent desperation. She looked at him amazed; he was strangely altered. He was no longer the humble suppliant;

he seemed to think he had earned a right to her, that she was his in equity.

“Mr. Huyton, you are unjust, and such language as this is strangely unpleasant to hear. I do not know what claim you have to speak so. I have never intentionally done anything to give you hopes that I should change as you wish. Again, I must ask you to be silent, or I shall leave this shelter; I would rather encounter the storm without, than listen to such words.”

“You do not know my claim? It is the claim of love, constant, unchanging love, the love of years. Not the feeble growth of a week’s intercourse; the every-day admiration, which at one moment distinguishes its object, the next leaves it without a sigh or a struggle; it is the passionate glowing devotion which rises beyond every earthly consideration, which sets neither honour nor duty above it,—which knows no honour, owns no duty except that of loving unchangeably and deeply. This is my claim, who can produce a better? who has striven harder,

longer, more devotedly, to make this love apparent ?”

“ I will neither listen to, nor answer such language,” replied she, decidedly ; “ let me pass.”

“ I will not,” said he, placing himself in the door-way ; “ do you suppose I would allow you to go out in this storm, expose yourself to such risk ? Sit still.”

“ Then,” said Hilary, reseating herself, “ as you are a man and a gentleman, be silent.”

“ You were not always so sternly resolute, Hilary !”

“ Nor you so ——” she stopped.

“ So what ? speak out, say what you mean at once,” said he, advancing close to her.

“ No, I shall not,” replied she, more gently, “ I am sure that you do not wish to give me pain, and that this unpleasant topic will be dropped henceforth.”

“ But do you not pity me ?” ejaculated he, seating himself again by her side, and clasping

her hand so firmly, that she could not withdraw it.

“ Yes.”

“ And nothing more, Hilary ? esteem, regard, kindly feelings, are all these gone, or did you never entertain them towards me ?”

“ You did not ask for these, Mr. Huyton ; you asked for love, which alone I could not give.”

“ Are you sure ?” said he, gazing intently at her. “ Are you certain that it is not pride of consistency, or ignorance of your own feelings which misleads you ? Do you know what love is, Hilary ?”

“ I do,” said she, in desperation, resolved even at the risk of raising an indignant jealousy, which she instinctively dreaded, to end his painful importunity. “ I know what love is, and that I do not feel it for you.”

“ Hilary ! Hilary !” cried he, in the wildest excitement, and more firmly than ever grasping her hand ; “ do you mean !—what am I to understand by that avowal ?”

“That I have no love to give you, Mr. Huyton—my hand and my heart are another’s.” Her blushes confirmed her words.

“And who has dared to step between me and my object?” said he, slowly, whilst his face grew dark with rising passion and jealousy. “Is it, can it be Captain Hepburn?—there is no other.”

“It is,” she tried to say, but the words hardly passed her lips; she was frightened by his look and tone.

“Has *he* dared!—what, when he was warned, when he knew my wishes, my intentions; ah, he did not know *me*! Did he think I would be baulked of my object? Does he think it is safe to come between me and my aim? Hilary, dearly shall you rue the day that you give your hand to that beggarly sailor. Bitterly shall you repent the deed! Whilst you are still Hilary Duncan, you are unspeakably dear to me, and for love’s sake, whilst there is hope, I will be whatever you may wish; but once destroy that

hope, once take from me all possibility of winning you, and I tell you, you will wish rather that a demon had crossed your path, than that you had thwarted me."

Indignant and offended, she raised her eyes to bid him leave her instantly, and they fell on the figure of Captain Hepburn himself, whose step on the wet turf had been inaudible, but who now stood in the door-way looking at them. Her start and exclamation made Charles release her hand and turn round too ; and Hilary, profiting by her freedom, sprang towards her lover, and clasped his arm as if to claim his protection.

"Take me away," she whispered, in an agitated voice.

Silently and gravely, he threw round her a cloak which he carried, and carefully wrapping her in it, he drew her hand under his arm, and prepared to leave the shed.

She gave one glance at Charles ; he was standing with his arms crossed, and a look of

haughty indifference, which she believed affected. In another moment they had turned away, and were taking the path homeward; but before they had gone a hundred yards, they heard the sound of his horse's hoofs at a sharp gallop, dashing along the road to 'the Ferns.' The sounds died in the distance, and Hilary, relieved and overpowered at once, very nearly burst into tears.

The storm was passing away, the rain had not quite ceased, but the sunbeams were struggling through the clouds, and every tree and shrub was fringed with glittering drops of light, whilst the effect of the flitting shadows chasing each other over the distant landscape was beautiful to see.

"There is no hurry," said Captain Hepburn, gently checking the impetuous steps with which Hilary had at first proceeded. "Do not agitate yourself, we are quite safe. The storm is all but over now, and you may walk quietly. It is pleasant to be together here, Hilary."

A gentle pressure of the arm on which she leant, was her only answer, she had not quite self-command enough to speak.

“I wish I had come a little sooner to look for you,” added he; “had you been long there?”

“I don’t know; it seemed long, it was so disagreeable,” and her voice was checked by a sob. But recovering by an effort, she added immediately: “However, it is over now, and we need not refer to it.”

He did not answer for a little while, but at last he said, very gently, but with a manner which seemed to indicate that his mind was made up on the point. “Hilary, I do not think that is right, either by me or yourself, in our relative situations. If I were to remain with you, to protect and watch over you, I would not ask for your confidence on that point. I could act for myself and you too. But since I must leave you so soon, and in the neighbourhood of that man, whose bad passions are all raised

by your refusal of his addresses, at least let me know all. Let me understand exactly what has passed, that I may form some idea of what there is to dread. Indistinctness of outline always magnifies objects. Let us view the matter calmly and clearly."

"How much do you know?" said she, looking up at him; "I never told you that."

"You did not, dear, but Miss Fielding told me at 'the Ferns,' that her cousin had been in love with you for years, had been refused by you once, but that he still hoped to win your love; and that the *fête* which so nearly cost you your life, was devised and carried out as a compliment to yourself."

"Had I suspected that," said Hilary, emphatically, "do you think any persuasion would have induced me to go there? Oh, no!"

"I thought that at the time, dear Hilary; and but for the abrupt conclusion to your share in the amusements, I should have taken the opportunity that afternoon, there in the very

midst of my rival's splendour, and all the riches and temptations which he displayed to bribe or buy your love, to offer you my hand, and a share in my humble fortunes."

"What consummate vanity!" said Hilary, smiling up at him with eyes that told a very different tale from her words; "could not your triumph in forcing me to like you, be complete without the glory of such a contrast?"

"Presumption I would plead guilty to; but if you knew the doubt and hesitation with which I contemplated the effort, you would not think it was the easy feeling of satisfied vanity, Hilary. To plunge after you into the lake was a trifle, compared to the plunge I meditated at the moment. But now I will not be baffled by smiles; tell me, if you love me, all that passed between Mr. Huyton and you just now."

With crimson cheeks, she repeated as well as she could the dialogue in the shed, until he stopped her by saying, "His last speech I heard! I never liked him or his cousin; there was a

something of intrigue and manœuvre in her which shocked me ; and for *him*—perhaps I was unjust, however. But his unmanly violence to you now, is hard to forgive. Is that what he calls love ? or can he suppose affection is won by threats ? Dear Hilary ! for your own sake, I am glad you did not love him.”

“ There never was any danger that I should,” said she, calmly.

“ Yes, there was great danger ; young, simple-minded, and inexperienced as you are ; too pure to suspect evil, too ignorant to know it, there was the greatest danger that this man, handsome, clever, rich, ardent, devoted, with every advantage which seclusion and leisure, time and place could supply, should have won your heart before you could rightly read his character. That your affections should have continued disengaged until I had gained them, appears to me a wonder, and a thing to fill me with gratitude. Dearest Hilary ! how can I be thankful enough ?”

“ You cannot imagine,” said Hilary, after a pause of gratified feeling, “ how great a shock it has been to me to find that he has shown himself what he is ; I never could have loved him, but I did esteem and like him. I thought well of him in many respects, and to find that he is so desperate, so self-willed, so violent, has really given me great pain. Oh, I hope he will leave the country now, that we shall never meet again !”

“ It was ungoverned temper, Hilary, made him speak as he did ; a disposition quite unaccustomed to be checked or thwarted. It will wear off. When he really sees that it is hopeless, I do not think he will continue to vex himself about it. The quick, fiery passions which explode so vehemently, are not those which are the most lasting and effectual in their results. Do not vex yourself, dearest, about it. Time will smooth down his asperity, perhaps. At any rate, he can do you no harm, he cannot alter

my trust in you, nor, I should hope, shake your confidence in me."

Hilary's smile shewed how entirely she agreed with her lover's opinion, which accordingly they continued to discuss, with great satisfaction, till they reached home.

CHAPTER VI.

“ When I was young, my lover stole
One of my ringlets fair ;
I wept, ‘ Ah no, those always part,
Who, having once changed heart for heart,
Change also locks of hair.’ ”

ANONYMOUS.

THE next thing that Hilary heard of Charles Huyton was, that he had quitted ‘ the Ferns,’ having dismissed his establishment, shut up the house, and intimated an intention of not returning for many months. This information was obtained by Captain Hepburn, and was received with great satisfaction, not only by Hilary, but by the reporter himself. He was very glad, as he was forced to leave her in so unprotected a

situation, to feel that so violent and determined a lover as Mr. Huyton threatened to be, should have removed himself from her immediate vicinity.

His leave of absence, prolonged to the last possible moment, ended, of course, much too soon, and the parting was naturally painful; but Hilary's cheerful and affectionate disposition supported her. She was certain of his love, and that was happiness enough to supply resignation and hope. Of the misery of protracted suspense, the pain of an uncertain engagement, the long anguish of patience, she knew nothing. She felt unlimited trust in her lover's constancy, as well as his character; and a calm dependence upon that merciful Providence to whose care she committed her future prospects. She was thankful, deeply thankful, that she had been saved from being captivated by the very engaging qualities of one whose principles she could not trust, and that another to whom she could look as a guardian, a director, and a guide, had been

brought within the circle of her acquaintance. If there was happiness to be found in this world, she believed it would be in his society ; and beyond, far beyond this world, there was that sure and certain hope which could support through the most stormy scenes of life, by pointing onward to a bright and peaceful "for ever" together. So she parted from Captain Hepburn with sorrow, yet with hope, and the tears which the former caused to overflow, were checked by the whispers of the latter ; and neither her grief nor her love made her a more careless daughter, or a less kind sister, nor occasioned any visible want of consideration for the feelings or wishes of others.

How often, in her leisure moments, the short black curl which lay in a small gold locket, his parting gift, was contemplated or kissed, it is not necessary now to say ; nor is there any means of ascertaining whether it received more attention than did the long shining, wavy lock with which she parted in exchange, and which

accompanied a pretty water-coloured likeness of herself, originally done by Mrs. Paine for Maurice, back to the Pandanus. One thing was certain ; that Maurice was very good-natured, and obliging, and allowed the picture which had been intended to ornament his cabin, to hang in the Captain's instead ; where it may be supposed to have served as a public avowal that the owner was indeed an engaged man.

Months rolled on, and brought no apparent change to the family at Hurstdene Vicarage. Nothing more was heard of Charles Huyton, except that he was incidentally mentioned in Isabel Barham's letters to her cousin, Mrs. Paine, as much in their society in London ; then as accompanying them on a trip to Paris ; then as having taken a moor in Scotland near one of her father's estates : and of their expectations of seeing him during their autumnal residence in Argyleshire.

The younger girls lamented his desertion of 'the Ferns' and the loss of his library ; but to

Hilary these months were days of peace and happiness compared with preceding excitement ; and she tried hard to persuade her sisters that Mr. Paine had as many books as they could read, and more than they could remember.

One other slight diversion they had, namely, the reappearance of Mr. Farrington, who came down for part of the long vacation, and took lodgings in the forest. He was an old acquaintance and friend of Mrs. Paine's, and was a great deal with them at Primrose Bank, and consequently often in the society of the sisters at the Vicarage. Not quite so often, perhaps, as he could wish ; for Hilary, grown wiser by experience, began to suspect that young men did not seek the society of girls entirely without an object, and became shy of encouraging a kind of intercourse, which, within her knowledge, had more often ended disastrously than otherwise. She could not help seeing that the young barrister admired Sybil exceedingly ; but she knew, that though her sister was womanly

in manners and appearance, she was child-like in disposition and character. Not quite sixteen, she was too young to think of matrimony ; and whilst she continued indifferent to Mr. Farrington and quite careless about his attentions, Hilary did not wish to encourage him to become more demonstrative.

Mrs. Paine agreed with her, indeed this caution originated with that lady ; and one day she took on herself to communicate to the gentleman the extreme youth of the object of his admiration. This brought on a confidential conversation between the lady and gentleman, in which he informed her that he was quite willing to wait a year or two, but that he was bent on making Sybil Duncan his wife hereafter. Then, if his business continued to flourish as it had done lately, he should by that time have a fair income to offer her, so he implored Mrs. Paine in the meanwhile, to give him a good character to that discreet, matronly, elder sister, who now looked as suspiciously on his attempt to be agree-

able as if she had to defend from desperate fortune-hunters an heiress of ten thousand a year.

Mrs. Paine laughed, and promised to speak pretty well of him; and when the vacation ended, Mr. Farrington was obliged to return to London, where, in spite of his love for Sybil, there seems no reason to think he was either miserable or morose.

So passed the autumn and early winter. Christmas brought the Barhams to the Abbey, and Hilary was thinking with much interest and some curiosity of Dora and her feelings, for it was some weeks since she had heard from her; when a servant from the Abbey brought over a note to ask Mr. Duncan and his eldest daughter to pay them a visit, with a promise of the carriage to fetch them one day, and to take them back the next.

Hilary felt doubtful about accepting the invitation, anxious as she was to see Dora; but a little postscript to Isabel's note, not at first discovered, compelled them to decide in favour of

going ; it was to the effect that Mr. Barham desired to see Mr. Duncan on business, which could not be discussed in a morning visit : so an answer was written, agreeing to the proposal. Her sisters all declared it was nonsense of Hilary being so unwilling to go ; it would be very pleasant ; the Abbey was, probably, full of pleasant people, besides Isabel and Dora, and Mr. and Mrs. Paine, who, it was known, had gone over on Monday, and were to stay till Saturday. What more could she want to be sure of an agreeable visit ?

She could only repeat that she preferred their society to any the Abbey could promise, and that home was pleasanter than any other place ; at which her sisters only laughed, and said " Let her try."

To the Abbey they went, arriving there, by particular desire, in time for the two o'clock luncheon ; and there they found assembled, besides Mr. Barham and his two daughters, only, the Paines and another gentleman, a young cler-

gyman, whose personal appearance immediately attracted Hilary's notice ; he being the first individual of a peculiar class with whom she had as yet met. There was something odd in the arrangement of his hair, in the appearance of his neckcloth, and in the shape of his coat-collar, which gave an idea of singularity rather than sanctity, and made her more inclined to wonder at than admire him.

She had not much time, however, to form conjectures relative to this gentleman, for the young ladies almost entirely engrossed her. Each, in her different way, appeared delighted to see her again, and really Isabel's more measured accents, and stately welcomes, were hardly less kind and cordial than the *mine caressante* and endearing words of Dora, who scarcely knew whether to laugh or cry at meeting, and could not express her affection and joy with sufficient emphasis to please herself.

The afternoon was fine, although it was mid-winter, and the ladies, having seen the four gen-

tlemen adjourn to Mr. Barham's private sitting-room, determined to go out for a refreshing walk. The sun was just setting in a clear green and amber sky, the air was sharp and frosty, with scarcely a cloud visible over-head to dim the beautiful half-moon hanging in the eastern heaven ; there was no wind to make it feel cold, and the ladies soon walked themselves into warmth and spirits, such as can only be known to those who are blessed with health and strength to enable them to enjoy active exercise in the free air.

"Now, Hilary," said Dora, as they turned their faces homewards, and slackened their walk into a comfortable strolling pace, "have you the least idea why papa sent for you?"

"Some kind of business with my father, I know," replied Miss Duncan, quietly, whilst Isabel exclaimed,

"Dora, how you talk ! I wanted to see you, Hilary."

"So did I," replied Dora, "but not a bit

would that have availed, had not papa had business ; it is about that Mr. Ufford, you know !”

“Dora, how can you interfere ! do, Fanny, tell all about it, for really Dora ought not,” again exclaimed Isabel, a little impatiently.

“I did not mean to say anything at present,” replied Mrs. Paine ; “but, as Dora has said so much, I will explain. Hilary, dear, we are going to leave you !”

“Leave us !” said Hilary, amazed ; “dear Mrs. Paine, what do you mean ?”

“The Rector of Copeley is dead, and you know my husband had the promise of the living.”

“Oh ! I remember ; I am very sorry, that is, I am glad for you, but sorry for us, for my father, for all : it will be hard to part ;” and the tears came into her eyes as she spoke.

“Do not trouble yourself to be glad,” said Mrs. Paine, affectionately, “I shall be most truly sorry when the time comes to part ; but it will not be yet ! we shall not move till the spring, I believe.”

“That is a comfort,” said Hilary ; “ what has Mr. Ufford to do with it ? ”

“ Nothing at present,” said Isabel, quickly, as if to prevent Dora from answering. “ That depends on your father, of course. But if Mr. Duncan could like him for a successor to Mr. Paine, we should be very glad ! ”

“ Oh ! ” was Hilary’s answer. On such a point she had little to say. She knew that Mr. Paine’s opinion would have great influence with her father ; and she thought his judgment might be trusted. If he approved of Mr. Ufford, all would be right ; and this she should soon learn from his wife.

“ Mr. Ufford is a man of very good family,” said Isabel, presently. “ He is the third son of Lord Dunsmore ; and though his fortune is small for his rank, I think you would find him an acquisition at Hurstdene. He is very pleasant, and really a good clergyman.”

Perhaps the thought how little either fortune or rank had to do with this latter recommend-

ation which passed through Miss Duncan's mind, prevented her answering this rather complicated speech. She felt sure also that Mr. Barham must have some private motive for interesting himself in the curate of Hurstdene ; so she resolved to wait before she gave any opinion relative to her own feelings on the subject. It was one which too nearly concerned their own domestic comfort to be lightly treated, had there been no higher motives, or more important objects connected with it.

The road to the Abbey led them up a thick avenue, where the leafless branches of the trees threw a most perplexing chequer-work of darkness across the white moonbeams as they lay on the ground, or fell on the figures of the ladies. Suddenly they saw a gentleman approaching them. Isabel uttered a little exclamation, indicative of very pleased surprise, before her companions recognised the new comer ; but the next moment Hilary saw with a mixture of uncomfortable feelings that it was

Mr. Huyton himself. The dread of meeting him had been one motive for her unwillingness to go to the Abbey, and great had been her relief on learning, soon after her arrival, that he was not at all expected. By what unlucky accident he chanced to come at the very time when it was least desirable, she did not know ; but she saw from the manners of Miss Barham, that though very welcome, he was yet quite an unlooked-for guest.

It was impossible in such a light, to mark any expression of features or changes of complexion, so Hilary's varying colour was safe from notice. How they should meet she could not guess ; but nothing was left to her decision. Mr. Huyton advanced, took Isabel's proffered hand, made his excuses with grace, spoke easily to Dora and Mrs. Paine ; and added, as he turned to her, .

“ And I have the pleasure, too, of seeing Miss Duncan. I hope you are quite well, and all your family.”

If ever Hilary was surprised in her life, it was at the composure and calmness with which her hand was taken, and these words were said. She would gladly have avoided shaking hands, but that was impossible; he went through the ceremony with such perfect grace and self-possession, as prevented it being awkward even to her, but with an air of indifference which amazed her when she thought of the past. As they returned to the house along the moon-lighted terrace, she could catch indistinct glimpses of his face, whilst he conversed gaily and courteously with her companions; and there was neither look nor tone which could convey the impression that her presence was a matter of the smallest consequence to him. Could he have quite recovered from the infatuation of past years! had he learnt to regulate his affections, and govern his feelings, to acquiesce in her decisions, and participate in her indifference? Might they associate on an easy footing, as friendly acquaintance, without awkwardness or

reluctance? She would have gladly believed this to be the case; but she feared to trust too entirely to appearances, when she remembered that more than once before she had been misled by his assumed calmness, to believe in the extinction of feelings, which seemed to have been only the fiercer for suppression.

No, she could never be comfortable with him again; she dared not trust him, so long as he continued single. If he would but marry some other woman, what a blessing she should esteem it. As she walked along musing thus, she only heard the sound of his voice, mingling with the tones of her companions: she did not understand a word they said; her memory was away in the sawyer's hut in the forest, and to her imagination, she was again listening to his threatening accents, or again clinging to that dear arm, which had so tenderly supported her from the unpleasant scene. She was so engrossed in these thoughts, that when Mr. Huyton turned to her, and observed, that he had

seen Mr. Duncan in the house, and was glad to find him well, she really, at first, hardly knew what he was talking of, and her answer betrayed her wandering thoughts so clearly, as to make Dora and Isabel both laugh at her absence of mind.

It was late enough when they reached the Abbey porch to make it quite allowable that the young ladies should retire to their several toilettes; and then Mrs. Paine begged Hilary's company at hers for a moment, to explain some circumstances which she could not so well speak of before their hostess. It appeared that the intelligence that the living of Copsley was vacant, had reached the Paines the day after they arrived at the Abbey, and that Mr. Barham, on learning it, immediately expressed a strong wish to secure the future curacy of Hurstdene for Mr. Ufford. Why he was so anxious about it, or what particular inducement there was to place that gentleman in so retired a position, Mr. Barham did not mention; but this

was avowedly his object in sending for Mr. Duncan. He wanted to settle it all immediately. That he had some ulterior motive, nobody who knew Mr. Barham could doubt, and Mrs. Paine had her own ideas on that point ; but she did not think it right to mention mere conjectures ; so she said she should leave Hilary to guess for herself. As to Mr. Ufford, she saw no harm in him, he seemed to be zealous, and talked well ; but she was rather doubtful of his sincerity ; he had a way of not speaking his opinions frankly, which made her uncomfortable, and she half-suspected him of extreme views, which might lead to injudicious innovations. But she was not sure of her own opinions, and most people were captivated by him ; even Mr. Paine thought him a most excellent young man ; so that it was, perhaps, bold in her to say that she did not quite like him.

“ But he strikes me,” continued she, “ as having an *idée fixe* of his own extreme personal importance and dignity ; and you know, Hilary,

that even very good men do often go very much astray, and become exceedingly inconsistent and strange, from having an ill-balanced character; from allowing one notion to overgrow their mind, and so warp or conceal other estimable qualities."

"Very probably," said Hilary; "but you say Mr. Paine likes him, and I expect my father will be guided by him. Oh, how I shall miss you! Mr. Ufford can never be what your husband has been to us: and there will be no compensation at all for the loss of you! Well, it is no use thinking of it; there are still three months left, I will not make them unhappy by anticipating the evil day; time enough when it comes. How do you think Dora is now? She looks very well."

"I do not know that she is otherwise; they thought her delicate in the summer, but I fancy she quite recovered both health and spirits before she joined her family in Scotland, and she has not been ailing since."

Hilary thought that this account did not agree with certain little notes she had received from time to time from Dora, speaking of a general disgust of life, an extreme want of spirits, and an inevitable tendency to a heart-broken death. But it was quite in accordance with her personal appearance, and her air of health and cheerfulness.

Dinner at the Abbey was always a grand and stately affair. The guests felt they were assisting at an important and solemn ceremony, a guarantee of the respectability of the ancient house of Barham; a remnant of the feudal times and the pomps of former days, when baronial ancestors had been served by squires and pages themselves of noble birth. Clinging to almost the last remnant of those by-gone days, Mr. Barham was particular about his livery-servants: they were many, they were well-trained, and their costume was as handsome as good taste could make it. In that gorgeously lighted room, contrast-

ing as completely as wealth and elegance could suggest, with the ancient refectory, or the convivial board of olden times, it was impossible to find a shadow of concealment ; a screen of any kind, to preserve blushing cheeks or troubled eyes from the glance of the curious, or the inspection of the sharp-sighted. So Hilary found to her cost ; the round table brought every one in sight of each other, and made every observation audible to the group.

It was at this particular time that Mr. Huyton addressed her with a question, regarding Maurice ; he hoped he was well ?

She replied in the affirmative, trusting that no one in the circle would care enough for her brother, or so little for herself, as to pursue the subject. She was mistaken. Mr. Huyton forced her to tell what was the name of his ship, and where she then was, which she could hardly do without naming Captain Hepburn, although to speak before him of her lover, was peculiarly distressing. On this, Mr. Barham took up

the subject, by asking, if he had not seen the young man at 'the Ferns:' a tall, dark, man, about thirty; older a good deal than Miss Duncan? Hilary, blushing exceedingly, and conscious that more eyes were fixed on her than she liked to meet, said *that* was not her brother; he was young and fair.

On this, Isabel, smiling graciously, observed, that she thought papa was thinking of Mr. Duncan's Captain, not himself; to which Mr. Barham observed, with his usual majesty, that it was by no means improbable: who might his Captain be?

Hilary gave an imploring look at Isabel, but for some occult reason, she did not choose to speak: Mrs. Paine's attention at the moment was not directed that way, nor, indeed, had she been disengaged, instead of listening to a remark of Mr. Ufford's, could she have interposed without awkwardness. Dora's eyes were on her china plate, which she was minutely examining, and Mr. Barham was looking at Miss

Duncan for an answer. How she wished her father had been present, to have answered for her ; but he did not dine with them, as he had a nervous dread of being troublesome or unpleasant from his infirmity. She felt she must reply ; indeed, it was but a moment that she hesitated ; a moment was enough to feel a great deal of embarrassment ; another, to resolve to brave it all ; and although conscious that Charles Huyton's eyes were reading her countenance with a deliberate intentness, which she thought quite cruel, she answered her host's question with sufficient distinctness, that his Captain's name was Hepburn.

“ Hepburn ! Hepburn ! that's a good name, an old family name, Miss Duncan, one long distinguished in Scotch history,” observed Mr. Barham. “ Did we not meet somebody of that name in Scotland, Isabel ? you, who are such a genealogist and historian, you must remember, I am sure.”

Isabel did remember accurately the whole genea-

logical table of the gentleman in question; and whilst she was relating some interesting historical anecdotes connected with the family, Hilary's hot cheeks had time to cool, and she trusted the name of her lover would not again be forced from her.

But when Isabel had finished her graceful little narrations, her father again turned to Miss Duncan, with a question as to whether she knew if her brother's Captain belonged to this ancient house. It was important, perhaps, for Mr. Barham's comfort, since he had done Captain Hepburn the honour of recollecting him, that he should be proved worthy of so great a compliment, by possessing the lineage of a gentleman. Hilary replied briefly, that she believed so.

To her very great astonishment, Charles Huyton spoke.

“Whether Captain Hepburn can prove his descent from honourable ancestors or not by genealogical records, he certainly does, by his

chivalrous conduct and noble bearing, if honour and courage are the attributes of high birth. He is as brave and gallant a man as I have ever seen."

Hilary gave one quick, grateful glance at her *vis-à-vis*, as he spoke these words, which was not thrown away. She knew better than any one else the effort it must cost him.

"Ah! I know to what you allude," said Isabel, with a sweet smile; "but if I remember rightly, Captain Hepburn was not the only one who displayed courage and daring on that occasion. Even Hilary must admit that there was another strong arm and bold heart then and there. The spectators, at least, saw both performers, although the immediate actors in the scene were, perhaps, only conscious of a part of what passed."

Hilary again looked up timidly at Mr. Huyton. She felt that thus appealed to, she ought to make some response; but she hardly knew what it would be safe to say. There was a

shade on his brow, a sort of frown, as if Isabel's words called up some bitter thought—as if he were struggling with painful feelings.

“ You are quite right, Isabel ; it was an occasion when it would be invidious to draw comparisons, or to do anything but give equal thanks to the one who saved my sister, and to the one who saved myself.”

Hilary's voice trembled slightly, as she spoke.

“ If that had been the only occasion on which Captain Hepburn had shewn his courage and dauntless spirit,” replied Charles, “ I should still say that he was first in honour, for he led the way ; I did but follow his example. But I know that is not the case. I know that it is only one of several such instances. I have heard that he has dared a leap into a wild tossing sea, in a dark and stormy day, to save a helpless fellow-creature. Is not that the fact, Miss Duncan ?”

With glowing cheeks and quivering eyelids, Hilary assented.

“Perhaps,” said Isabel, “there are braver acts done quietly and almost unnoticed, even than that, heroic as it seems. Acts which require a more generous heart and noble nature, than the humane courage, which would lead a sailor to dare the storm, to help a shipmate in distress.”

Mr. Huyton rather looked, than asked for, an explanation. Isabel went on.

“To throw oneself from the pedestal of glory, in order to place another there, to refuse the honourable distinction due to courage, that it may be transferred to a companion in exertion, is a quiet heroism, a generous self-devotion, which requires a firmer and a braver heart than the mere defiance of bodily danger.”

Mr. Huyton bent down his eyes upon the damask table-cloth, and only showed by the silence that followed, that he understood the lady’s meaning. Hilary could not avoid looking at him; she knew better than Isabel the extent of generosity which could induce him to praise

a successful rival. No words which he could have spoken could have so moved her heart towards him, as this commendation of one whom she had supposed him to dislike. It was noble, candid, high-minded ; she had not given him credit for such feelings, she had been unjust to him in her imagination ; she wished to make amends. She gave him a look which expressed some part of her feeling ; and whilst with lips trembling with emotion, and eyes sparkling with pleasure, she glanced at him, he suddenly raised his own eyes, met hers, and read her heart.

Isabel Barham little suspected the hidden emotions of the man to whom she was carefully studying to be agreeable. If she had at one time, for a short period, feared the influence of Hilary, such fears were entirely dissipated by the intelligence which had reached her, of her friend's engagement. She little dreamt how often the Vicar's daughter had refused the hand to which she was so willing to reach out her

own ; or that the affections she would so gladly have won, had long been passionately and hopelessly devoted to another.

The heiress of the Abbey would not have deigned to stoop for a heart which her inferior rival had refused to accept ; she would have scorned the acquisition, had she really understood the position of affairs. Had she *loved* Mr. Huyton, her feelings would have been different ; but love had nothing to do with the matter ; it was a desirable connection, that was all. She might be capable of loving, perhaps, if she had the temptation ; but as yet it had never occurred, and Charles Huyton was not the man to captivate her nature. The vagaries of affections are incomprehensible, and unaccountable by any rule ; but the effects of ambition, love of importance, and worldly position, are much more easy to calculate. By these, at the present moment, Miss Barham was governed.

The dinner was over at last, and Hilary, re-

leased from the position *vis-à-vis* to Mr. Huyton, rejoiced to devote her attention to her father, who was waiting for them in the drawing-room. The rest of the evening went by without emotion of any trying nature. Mr. Huyton had a good deal of conversation with Mr. Duncan, during which Hilary escaped to the other end of the room; she had no wish to throw herself in the way of the young man, although she was pleased that he should show attentive deference to her father. Isabel Barham was also carefully kind to the clergyman, and it was a pretty contrast to see her standing beside his chair, with her graceful figure, and queenly air, talking with elegant animation, reading in the best-modulated voice in the world short passages from some new book she was discussing, and raising her head occasionally, to put back the long, dark ringlets which swept her well-turned shoulders, and would fall over her cheeks, as she stooped to refer to the work before her.

Mr. Ufford joined Hilary at the table where

she was standing, turning over a book of prints, and entered into conversation on the topic of Hurstdene, its village, population, schools, church, and such particulars as might naturally be considered interesting to him. She found him, as Mrs. Paine had said, pleasing and gentle in manners, with a peculiar way of winning from those he conversed with their opinions ; whilst he seldom committed himself by stating his own. It did not strike her at the time so much, but when she subsequently came to reflect upon their conversation, she found that she literally knew nothing more of his tastes, habits, opinions, and inclinations, than might be gathered from the courtesy with which he had listened to hers. It rather seemed, on review, as if he had been judging her, and for that purpose had succeeded in inducing her to develope her own views and feelings. She was not sure that she liked him ; she hardly thought this fair, and she resolved, if they met again, to preserve greater equality in their steps towards a friendly acquaintance.

They kept rather late hours at the Abbey ; it was midnight before the party broke up, although there was nothing particular doing to entertain them. When, however, the ladies did retire, Hilary watched, with an indescribable interest, the greeting between Isabel and Charles Huyton ; she could not keep her fancy from speculating on, and her heart from seriously wishing for their union, and she half hoped that the long conversation which had engrossed them both, after Mr. Duncan had left the drawing-room at his usual hour, might be indicative of an approach to the sentiments which she desired.

His last words to her were spoken as easily, and in as disengaged a tone, as to Mrs. Paine herself, and Hilary went to her room, with a persuasion that the meeting was less uncomfortable than she could have expected. She drew a low chair to the fire, and sat down to think ; but her reverie was soon interrupted by a light tap at a door she had not previously noticed, which, on opening, disclosed Dora Barham in

her dressing-gown, with her long hair all hanging about her shoulders.

“Our rooms adjoin, you see, dear Hilary,” said she, closing the door, and coming up to her friend. “I have sent my maid to bed, and now let me talk to you.”

She threw herself on the carpet at her feet, laid her arm in Hilary’s lap, and looked up in her face with a wistful expression.

“Oh, I am so unhappy! I do not the least know what to do. What ought I to do?—do tell me!”

“My dearest Dora! how can I?” replied Miss Duncan, caressing the soft round cheek, and lovingly putting back the glossy hair which spread over her knee.

“Oh, you do know a great deal. They want me to marry, and I cannot, will not; you know why. But they do so want me to marry.”

“Who do?”

“Papa and Isabel, and Lady Margaret. Oh, it’s dreadful; you do not know what I have gone through these six months.”

“To marry !” said Hilary ; “ what, to marry in a general way, or is there some one in particular ? You talk vaguely.”

“ Oh, one man in particular : Mr. Ufford !”

“ What, this clergyman ?”

“ Oh no, his elder brother, a much older man, a widower, too, with one little girl ; think of wanting to make me a step-mother.”

“ And you do not like this gentleman ?”

“ No, not much, pretty well ; he is pleasant, and good, and kind. I like him better than his brother here ; he is much more open and generous ; only if he would have been so obliging as not to fancy himself in love with me, I should have liked him much better.”

“ And now, where is he ? is he still wanting to marry you ?”

“ He says, of course, if I am so averse, he will not press his suit ; but he shall and must love me to the end of time ; and papa says I am a silly child, and do not know my own mind. And oh, Hilary, he said—‘ Dora, if you loved

another, I would not have pressed you to accept this offer ; but since your heart is disengaged, there is no reason that you should not marry a man of such a character and such a position as Mr. Ufford !”

“ And what did you say, Dora ?”

Dora hid her face and sobbed, then said —

“ I complained of his age, his daughter, my youth, my indifference, but I got no pity. They would not admit these to be objections.”

“ Then you could not plead that your affections were pre-engaged, Dora ?”

Again the face was hidden, and there was silence.

“ Dora !” said Hilary, stooping and kissing her, “ do not be ashamed to say so, if you are indifferent to *him* ; I shall not blame you, if you have conquered an imprudent inclination ; speak to me, say is that the case ?”

“ No,” cried she, with vehemence, and raising her flushed face suddenly, “ I have not. I love your brother better than ever ; absence, time,

separation, make no difference. I love him now, and I shall love him for ever !”

“Then why not tell your father? had you owned it then, you would have been able to explain all.”

“I was going to. I intended to have told him; I was only thinking how to begin, when he silenced me by adding, ‘I say this, Dora, because I feel assured any daughter of mine would be incapable of forming or owning to an unworthy passion; of encouraging an affection beneath her, of consulting wild and childish fancies, rather than the claims of her family, the advancement of her best interests, and the maintenance of that elevated position in society, in which she has been placed by her birth and fortune.’ What could I say after that, Hilary? Own that I loved a poor lieutenant! I dared not.”

There followed a long silence. To urge on her friend measures, which, if they did not altogether embroil her with her father, would be

so much more advantageous to Maurice than to Dora, was impossible for Hilary. She had given her opinion of right and wrong, she could do no more ; so the two girls sat together, looking at the fire, and each plunged in thought.

“ What must I do ? ” at last sighed Dora. “ I sometimes think of going into a convent ; if I were only a Roman Catholic, I would.”

“ My dear Dora ! ”

“ Then,” continued the wilful little penitent, “ I think of telling Mr. Ufford that I love another, and so getting him to give me up. What do you think of that ? ”

“ I do not know.”

“ Hilary, would you, for all the riches and titles in the world, marry any other than Captain Hepburn, tell me ? ”

“ Certainly not ; I could not.”

“ Nor will I then Maurice ; our cases are exactly similar.”

“ Not quite.”

“ Yes they are ; we each love one, and that

feeling makes it wrong to engage ourselves to another. There is no difference."

"A little. I have my father's consent to my affection and engagement. If I had not, I should try to obtain it."

"And if you could not?"

"I should try to conquer my affection."

"What! and leave your lover to suppose you faithless, changeable, treacherous? I will not."

"Yes. If it is not right to love, it matters little what he thinks of you, in comparison of doing right. Your duty is to conquer an improper, unauthorised affection, and the sooner the better."

"But it is not improper; it is right to love as I do."

"Then tell your father, Dora."

"I dare not—he will not think it right."

"Nay, then it is wrong."

"Cruel, cruel Hilary!"

"I am sorry to seem so, dear Dora; but it appears to me so plain. There are but two

things to do. Own your attachment and abide by the consequences ; or conquer it, and give Maurice up entirely."

"I have nothing to give up ; I am not bound to him, nor he to me, except in unalterable affection. That is all."

"A most unhappy affection. How much better for you both, if you could renounce it entirely. Continued as it is, it can only make you discontented, miserable, unable to adopt any path in life. If you could but overcome and forget it !"

"And marry Mr. Ufford ? Never !"

Hilary was silent again.

"I never thought to hear such words from you, Hilary," continued Dora. "Have you no regard for honour and principle, that you advise me to marry without love ? have you no affection left for Maurice, that you bid me abandon him ? none for me, that you desire me to perjure myself ? Oh, shame, shame on you, Hilary ! You do not deserve to be Maurice's sister."

“ I do not deserve such reproaches,” replied Miss Duncan steadily, looking at her friend’s glowing face, as she started to her feet before her. “ I never proposed, or prompted such ideas.”

“ What did you mean, then ?”

“ That you should really and honestly try to conquer your unfortunate predilection for my brother. Surely there is no virtue in obstinate constancy ; the passion denominated love, has no such merit in itself, that it should be clung to at the expense of all other good qualities ; that candour, and filial affection, and self-denial, and self-control, are all to be sacrificed to it. What is it after all, but often a merely selfish inclination, a determined perseverance in our own way, this constancy which is so much praised and extolled ? And as to making one happy, what can be a greater delusion ! It seems to me that persisting in an unfortunate attachment, is very like persisting in entertaining some wearing illness, which makes you uncomfortable in yourself, and uneasy to those around you.”

“ But, Hilary, one cannot help these things ; love may be a disease, but it is an incurable one, —at least, in cases where the infection is really taken.”

“ I do not believe that, Dora. We are not sent into this world to be the sport of our passions ; and I am convinced that our natural affections need no more be fatal to us, than our necessary acts, such as eating and drinking. We may, by mismanagement, bring our bodies or our minds into such a state, that the things which should conduce to our health and happiness, may produce fatal consequences ; but then who is to blame ? Consider the end and object of this life ; to prepare for a better, a peaceful, blissful state, where darkness, doubt, and distress cannot come ; where tears shall disappear for ever : and can you suppose that we are necessarily victims to deplorable passions which must so entirely interfere with this great object ? that love, which is intended to assist us onwards, can of its own nature be ungovernable

and incurable? Oh no; we may learn to command every passion, even the strongest, if we seek aright."

"You are just talking enigmas to me; you know very well I never learnt any thing about self-control; and Maurice loves me as I am. I shall go and take the first opportunity of telling Mr. Ufford I love another; for I never could bear to be step-mother to a girl of twelve years old. It is too absurd of papa to expect it at all."

She quitted the room, leaving Hilary to meditate at leisure on what had passed; to grieve over the mutual infatuation of her brother and her friend, and to comfort herself that at least Dora's pettish injustice would not last, for she could not bear to quarrel with her.

CHAPTER VII.

“ Her moods, good lack ! they pass like show’rs.
But yesternight, and she would be
As pale and still as wither’d flow’rs ;
And now to night she laughs and speaks,
And has a colour in her cheeks——”

ISEULT.

HILARY knew Dora better than this wayward little thing knew herself. She came back very penitent and humble, before she could sleep ; and after a great deal of kissing and crying for her crossness, she ended by insisting on sleeping with Hilary, and taking that opportunity of keeping her friend awake half the night, talking alternately of Captain Hepburn and Maurice.

The morning hours after breakfast passed rather heavily away. The ladies were together in their sitting-room, the gentlemen were all invisible, nobody exactly knew where. Isabel was grave, Dora was languid, and Hilary was thoughtful.

"Where's Mr. Huyton?" yawned Dora; "how stupid of him not to come and talk to us! I am so tired. What's become of him, Isabel?"

"Really I do not know; perhaps he is in the library."

"No, I went in there, just now, and Mr. Ufford was all alone, reading St. Augustine, I believe, and making extracts. You may guess I did not disturb him. Where is your father, Hilary?"

"He and Mr. Paine are together," said Miss Duncan.

"Oh, how tired I am," said Dora, laying a very pale cheek against the crimson back of her easy chair.

"Mr. Huyton never goes away in general, where can he be?"

“I should not wonder if he has gone to ‘the Ferns,’” observed Mrs. Paine.

Isabel looked up. “What makes you think so, Fanny?” asked she.

“I heard him order his horse to be ready immediately after breakfast, and you know he left the table early.”

“Ah, I dare say he had business, and that brought him down into the country,” said Miss Barham, quietly; “he feels so much at home here, that as his own house is not habitable at present, he naturally resorts to ours, when he wants a brief habitation.”

From all which Hilary gathered, that when with the Barhams, either at the Abbey or elsewhere, he was accustomed generally to make himself agreeable.

“I wish something would happen!” said Dora, presently, with another yawn.

“What?” inquired Mrs. Paine.

“Oh, anything, an event! something to rouse and excite one; to give one a fillip. I do

not quite want an earthquake, but I should like something !”

“ Poor child !” said Mrs. Paine, laughing ; “ it wants a new toy, or a nice cake.”

“ No, it is sick of cakes, and tired of toys,” said Dora ; “ it wants good wholesome food, and a little work instead of play. I should like to lose my fortune, and have to work for my bread. I think I could be happy then.”

“ Pretty work you would make of it !” said Isabel ; “ I wonder how you would begin.”

“ Why, really that is a problem worth solving,” replied Dora ; “ I wonder too. What part of my education do you suppose was intended to fit me for the storms of adversity ? which branch of the distorted and grotesque plant, which forms my small portion of the Tree of Knowledge, would be of the slightest use to me in distress ? I think I might, perhaps, be capable of engaging as a ballet-dancer ; but as to anything else, I am sure I cannot guess.”

“ How can you talk so ?” exclaimed her sister ;

“it is quite improper. You have had a very good education for a lady !”

“Well, I happened to see one of the maids cleaning the grate to-day in my room, and she looked so busy, so happy, and was chirruping so cheerfully to herself, that I could not help stopping her to ask her what made her so merry : and she said in a frightened voice, as if excessively ashamed of herself, that she had no time to be unhappy, so she could not help it ; for she had so much to do, that really if she had a mind to fret, she should not have a minute to spare, for she was quite an under-housemaid, you see, and had to do the work, whilst the others looked after her. I told her I envied her !”

“You ought not to put such ideas into their heads, Dora ; it is republican and levelling.”

“I do not think what I said will do any harm, Isabel. Hilary, if you had to work for your bread, what would you do ? Should you not like it ?”

“ I believe I do it pretty much now,” replied Miss Duncan ; “ and I do not particularly wish for a change.”

“ Well, I do,” said Dora, closing her eyes, and sinking into profound silence.

The morning past, the luncheon hour arrived, and not till after that did Mr. Huyton make his appearance, nor did he publicly account for his absence, or at all explain where, or how, he had spent the three or four hours during which he had disappeared. The Duncans were to return home after luncheon, and as Hilary was proceeding up the long stairs to her room, to prepare for her departure, she encountered him at the top of them.

He stood back a little, as if to let her pass, but turned and joined her in the gallery.

“ Are you going ?” said he, wistfully looking at her.

“ Yes, presently ; you have been riding, have you not ?”

“ I have been to Hurstdene !”

Hilary looked surprised.

“Yes, I spent the morning there ; I longed, with an inexpressible longing, to see those scenes again, to tread those walks, look at those walls once more. You were here, my presence at the Vicarage could not disturb *you* ; could excite no anger in you ; I ventured to gratify my wishes. To take one more view of the place I dearly loved, where I was once welcomed as a constant, and only too happy guest.”

“Did you see my sisters ?” asked Hilary, embarrassed and pained.

“Yes, they were as kind as ever. I have at least one thing to thank you for—you have kept my secret well. Dear girls ! they little knew, when they playfully reproached me for my long absence, whose wish it was it should be so ! It is noble of you, Miss Duncan, to allow me to retain their good will ; not to teach them to view me with aversion ; not to inspire them with the cold dislike you entertain towards me yourself.”

“Indeed, you do me injustice, Mr. Huyton,” replied Hilary, gently, and pausing, in the gallery through which they were passing; “it is not aversion that I feel for you.”

“And when we met yesterday by moon-light, could I not even then read the expression of your face? the chilling indifference of which it spoke, haunted me all night; and your hand too, did it not tell the same tale? those fingers which once used to return the pressure of mine, now coldly suffer me to touch them, passively submitting to a form which is demanded by good manners, not expressive of sympathy. Do you suppose I am insensible, or indifferent to the change? Would to Heaven I could annihilate the last eighteen months, and stand once more by your side the friend I once claimed to be!”

“Would that we could, Mr. Huyton, so far as you are concerned,” replied she, gravely; “but the wish is idle and vain! we are what we have made ourselves, and feelings, words, actions,

can never, *never* be recalled. Would that it were possible to begin anew our acquaintance !”

“ I would still be your friend, Hilary,” said he, in a more gentle voice ; “ may I not be that, may I not sometimes see you on these terms ?”

“ I believe you would ; I know you are generous and noble ; I cannot forget your words last night, and I can honour the feeling that dictated them.”

A flash of joy passed across his face at these words, and fixing his eyes on her, he said :

“ And may I hope that you will still see me, receive me as a friend—let me sometimes visit your father, sometimes converse with you ?”

She shook her head. “ Not now ; not under present circumstances.”

“ Not for your father’s sake ? he loves me, you know,” said he, persuasively.

“ I dare not.”

“ Dare not ! which then is it that you will

not trust, my honour or yours, Hilary ?” There was a shadow gathering on his brow.

“Why should we peril either,” replied she ; “mine, yours, or that of another who is **far** away ? You know my faith is pledged to him, to what end then *our* meeting, until you too have chosen another object for the love you have so unfortunately misplaced ? Then we *may* meet perhaps as friends. Till then, let us part as friends.”

“You have nothing more to fear from me, from my love,” replied he, bending down his eyes, to conceal their expression. “But neither has any one aught to hope from it ! For me to love again is impossible. Let it be enough that I resolve to extinguish a vain, hopeless passion. I ask now to be trusted as a friend only. Can you not believe me so far as that ?”

“It is wisest not to try,” said she, slowly.

“What makes you so mistrustful ?” questioned he, looking earnestly at her.

“Experience !” was her answer ; whilst the

colour deepened on her cheeks, as she thought of past scenes.

“Are you quite candid now, Miss Duncan? is it not, rather, the injunction, the wish, perhaps, I should say, of *him*, of Captain Hepburn? Did not he bid you shun me? It cannot be your own nature to be so newly suspicious; tell me it is his.”

“No, indeed, he laid no restriction on me: he trusted entirely to my prudence, and I will shew I deserved it.”

“I would rather it had been his wish; I could have borne his suspicions better,” said Charles, sadly. “But surely, could he see me now, he would not fear me. I only aspire to be your friend, I only ask for calm and quiet intercourse; I have no pretensions now which could create jealousy, or make him suppose me a rival. I own his superiority, I admire, I esteem him; my own hopes being gone, I may at least rejoice that one worthy of you has won you; I am resigned to my loss; why should

you make it more bitter than necessity requires?"

She was silent, but she drew back when he tried to take her hand.

"If he did not mistrust me, why should you? *He*, at least, knows us both better, does more justice both to you and me. Why should you hesitate? It is such a small favour I ask. For your father's sake, let me come sometimes and see him."

"No, Mr. Huyton, I cannot. Unlimited trust deserves unwavering prudence. Do not ask again, it is decided. At Hurstdene, and on purpose, I will not meet you. Let me say now, farewell. It is hard to refuse one to whom I owe so much; it is hard to seem ungrateful; but it is best. But you shall always have my best wishes, my earnest prayers for your happiness; I will never forget that the hand I hold assisted to save my life."

"Would that I had perished then and there!" cried he, losing self-control for a moment.

“Would that the water had closed upon us both—that I had gone down with you in my arms, rather than——” he stopped abruptly ; foot-steps were heard ascending the stairs, he was recalled to a thought of where he was ; he only stayed one moment to press her hand in both of his, to kiss it with a warmth, a passionate ardour, which did not speak of cold friendship ; to give her one sad, reproachful look, and then he rushed towards his own dressing-room, which was in an adjoining corridor, leaving Hilary to enter her apartment, near the door of which they had been standing, and there to conceal her excitement and her fears.

She had proceeded but a little way in her preparations for departure, when Dora rushed into the room, her bonnet in one hand, and her cloak in the other.

“I am going with you, Hilary, for the drive,” cried she ; “the horses must stop there to rest ; for I have made papa agree that it was more civil I should go home with you.”

She seemed in great spirits, and danced about at intervals, whilst she was pretending to dress.

“You are awake now, Dora,” said her friend, smiling; but her voice betrayed at once that her own tears were not far off.

“What is the matter?” exclaimed Dora, stopping to look anxiously at her friend; “what have you been crying about, Hilary, tell me?”

“Nothing worth talking of—my own folly,” replied Miss Duncan, turning away, and stooping to look at the lock of a carpet bag.

“I have long known,” said Dora, gravely, “that you were a very foolish child, always crying about nonsense and trifles; so I can easily believe you. No doubt you hurt your foot against a step, or pricked your finger with your brooch, and that made you cry.”

Hilary laughed a little, and did not answer otherwise.

“I want to come and stay with you at the Vicarage for some days,” continued Dora, in another voice. “Do ask me, I should so like it. Tell papa you want me.”

“I am afraid Mr. Barham would think I was taking too great a liberty in asking you, Dora.”

“Oh no, he would not mind ; you ask me, and he will let me go. You do want me, do you not?”

“Very much,” said Miss Duncan, kindly ; “it would give me great pleasure indeed to have you there, but I hardly think you are likely to be permitted.”

“Oh, we will see,” said Dora, “now I am ready ; are you ? then come down.”

Mr. Huyton was down stairs with the other visitors when the girls descended ; calm, self-possessed, and courteous ; listening gracefully to Isabel, who was discussing a question on political economy with Mr. Ufford ; whilst Mr. Barham sat by with a look of paternal pride.

Hilary ventured to make the request dictated by Dora ; it was graciously received, treated as a very great kindness and honour, and if Miss Duncan liked to trouble herself with such a wild, thoughtless little child as Dora, he should

be very happy at some future time ; they would think of it.

“ Mrs. Paine returns to Primrose Bank on Saturday,” suggested Dora, “ let me go then to the Vicarage ; it would suit Hilary very well, I know.”

Dora settled it all her own way ; Isabel did not disapprove ; it was true that Mr. Ufford was to leave them also in company with the Paines, but Mr. Huyton had promised to remain some time longer, and she was just as well pleased that her sister should *not* be there during this visit ; for so carefully did Charles balance his attentions, and so strictly impartial was he to both sisters, that the eldest never actually felt sure whether she was, or was not, the one preferred.

Very glad indeed was Hilary to be back in her own home, and away from the grandeur and restraints of Drewhurst Abbey. She never felt so much at ease with Mr. Barham as with any one else, and the sight of Charles Huyton made her unhappy. The great sur-

prise which her sisters expected to afford her, turned out a failure ; for she had already heard of their visitor ; but it was news to Dora, who had not guessed where he had been, and who did not fail on her return home to charge him with it.

Saturday came, and brought the younger Miss Barham to take up her abode at the Vicarage, as she had promised, much to the delight of the sisters there, who could not make enough of her. She was in great spirits, laughing and chatting rather wildly, and making them all laugh, too, with her nonsense. Her grief and anxiety sat lightly indeed on her. The Paines and Mr. Ufford accompanied her, the latter to be introduced to the Vicarage ; he was to preach the next morning. Mr. Duncan appeared extremely pleased with him, and there was every prospect that Mr. Barham's plans would be carried out.

Two or three days passed ; Dora was still at the Vicarage, very happy and amusing, when,

one morning, Hilary returning to the drawing-room, after a brief absence, found two visitors there, one of whom was a stranger. However, from his resemblance to his companion, she guessed him to be the elder Mr. Ufford, before Dora, with some blushes and embarrassment, introduced him as such.

He was a pleasing and sensible-looking man, with an air of elegance becoming his birth, but with nothing in the slightest degree affected, or wearing the appearance of dandyism. He was simply in the best sense a gentleman, and a very good-looking one, too. Hilary liked him very much. Neither was he so immensely old, as Dora had represented him ; to look at him, you could hardly believe him eight-and-twenty ; and but for the certainty of his having a daughter, she would never have given him credit for a greater age. Possibly the representations of Dora had overstepped the facts, and this obnoxious child might not be quite so much as twelve years old.

Mr. James Ufford, the clergyman, was the bearer of a message from Mrs. Paine, who was desirous to see Miss Duncan on some parochial matters, but was detained at home by cold and headache : he had, accordingly, set off to bring this message ; and on the way had been overtaken by his brother, who had ridden over from Drewhurst Abbey that morning. It was proposed, partly on Dora's suggestion, that they should all walk over to Primrose Bank together, and accordingly they presently set out, Hilary and Gwyneth with Mr. Ufford, junior, Dora under the care of the elder brother.

These two did not attempt to keep up with the others, and Hilary soon lost sight of them. Perhaps, concern for her brother made her quick-sighted, but she could not help fancying that, in spite of her assertions, Dora was by no means unwilling to receive the admiration, or permit the attentions, of her companion ; and she could not anticipate any other conclusion to the affair than what Captain Hepburn had predicted as most probable.

She was so much engrossed in these considerations as to afford but indifferent company to Mr. James Ufford, who, in consequence, devoted himself to Gwyneth, and succeeded in convincing that young lady, that he was, without exception, the most delightful man in the world, even before they reached Primrose Bank.

Hilary went straight in-doors, and sought Mrs. Paine, who was in her own room ; but the other two, tempted by the fineness of the day, lingered on the little lawn, looking at the blossoms of the laurustinus bushes, and planning imaginary changes in the flower-beds, until they were rejoined by the others, who had loitered behind.

Mrs. Paine and Miss Duncan having finished their business, came down stairs together, when they found the drawing-room full. Besides those for whose presence they were prepared, Charles Huyton was there, whose visit was unexpected by either ; he had, however, come over from the Abbey in company with George

Ufford, and whilst the latter had followed his brother, he had been wandering about with Mr. Paine, inspecting the out-houses, which wanted some alterations, and planning other improvements in the place.

He was now gaily conversing with Dora Barham, and even after he had advanced to greet the two ladies, he again returned to her side ; whilst she, with more coquetry than Hilary had suspected her of feeling, seemed encouraging him, either from actual preference, or to pique George Ufford ; it was not easy to decide which. Miss Duncan made up her mind that day, that constancy and earnestness were not a part of Dora's nature ; that her conduct depended on her feelings ; whilst her feelings appeared entirely under the influence of chance or accident, varying at every turn.

Perhaps Dora was afraid of her friend's reproaches, for after their return home, where they were escorted by James Ufford alone, the other gentlemen being obliged to ride back to the

Abbey, she carefully avoided any occasion of having a confidential discussion of the past. In a very few more days she was to return home, and Hilary hoped sincerely they might part without any further reference to her personal affairs. But this was not the case. Miss Duncan discovered accidentally that in a letter Gwyneth had been writing to Maurice, Dora had persuaded her to insert so many messages, so much of reminiscence and kindness, as must tend to delude Maurice, as it perhaps deluded herself, into the idea that she was still constant to him in her affections, and unchangeably bent on loving him alone.

Hilary felt obliged to remonstrate.

“Please don’t, Dora, another time. It is not right to any one; to Gwyneth, or to Maurice, or yourself, or your father; if I had known it in time, I should have stopped the letter.”

Dora looked half-vexed and half-foolish.

“You are so precise, Hilary; you are not like anybody else.”

“Perhaps not ; but we are not talking of myself, but of Maurice and you.”

“I quite wonder you consider it correct to put us in the same sentence, when you seem so determined to keep us apart,” continued Dora.

“Now, please, dear Dora, do be reasonable,” said Hilary, imploringly ; “can I ask you to come here that you may carry on a clandestine correspondence with my brother ? What would your father say ?”

“My dear Hilary, everybody has their peculiarities ; yours is to be haunted with the idea that everybody is doing something improper, unless they will proclaim their deeds at the market cross.”

“What is clandestine must be wrong,” said Hilary, decidedly.

“But can you not comprehend, my dear young friend, that there is a difference between secrecy and improper concealment ? It is not necessary to publish everything one knows, neither is it wrong to avoid some topics. Even

to a father there may be things which it is better not to repeat; there may be subjects concealed from the best of motives."

"That is all very true, perhaps, but the difference between discretion and dissimulation is positive, Dora. If you feel sure that when he knows your conduct he will approve it; and consider your secrecy was justifiable and proper, you may venture to practise it, I suppose, without fear."

Dora was silent.

"Neither is it fair to Maurice," continued Hilary; "you are misleading him; I do not blame you for learning to prefer another, but—"

"No," interrupted Dora, "you could hardly do that, at least, with justice, since it is not the case."

"Dora, you deceive yourself, surely; your manners to Mr. Ufford—"

"Dear Hilary, don't tell me my manners encourage *him*," cried she, rather alarmed; "I

assure you I do not mean it in the least ; but what can I do ? He is so gentle and amiable, I cannot be cross to him, and you would not have me rude, I am sure ; so then I turn round and flirt with Mr. Huyton to get rid of the other, and you look at me with such fault-finding eyes : are you jealous, Hilary, is it that ? I believe Mr. Huyton loves you all the time. Oh, Hilary ! what a blush ; my dear girl ! you are jealous then : what will Captain Hepburn say ?”

“ If I did not know that you are talking all this nonsense merely to get rid of my remonstrances, I should be seriously displeased with such foolish language, Dora ; as it is—”

“ As it is, Hilary, you must bear with me ! I love Maurice, and Maurice only, but Mr. Huyton amuses me when I am dying of *ennui* ; he is pleasant and clever, and I know well that he has no heart to bestow, to have any dread of entangling it. Do you think I have not seen how he loves you ! how he follows

you with his eyes, listens to your voice, even whilst he is talking to others; worships your shadow, and haunts your footsteps? I never could make out why you did not like him; for although I do not myself, I think you might suit him, and he you."

"All this has nothing to do with what I was talking of, Dora; you know Mr. Huyton is nothing to me; but whilst I retain any regard for you, (and that must be always,) I cannot help wishing to prevent your doing wrong, and deceiving yourself and Maurice."

"Well, I will not deceive Mr. Ufford; I will tell him plainly my opinion the very first opportunity!"

"Are you quite sure what your opinion is? are you certain that when you send him away, you shall not regret what you have done? Do you really wish to give him up?"

"I would give up twenty such men for Maurice."

"Consider, Dora, if you were to marry my

brother, you would become the wife of a poor man, one who must immediately curtail all the luxuries and indulgence which have become habit to you. Are you seriously bent on this—prepared for it? ”

“ I should like poverty—riches and luxury disgust me ; I am weary of indulgence.”

“ But think what it would be to lose your place in society, which you must do when you ceased to be Miss Barham, of Drewhurst Abbey, to step down into retirement and neglect ; to lay aside your elegant style of toilette, to give up your horses, your carriages, your journeys here and there at pleasure ; your multitude of attendants, your luxurious rooms. To have to wait on yourself, order your own dinners, put up with indifferent and awkward servants, consider before you spent even five shillings, calculate which joint of meat is most economical, and how to make it last longest and go farthest ; perhaps even to repair your own wardrobe, certainly to walk about on foot ;

and to live in small rooms, with the certainty of not being able to travel for change or diversion. Could you patiently put up with all this, and smile away difficulties and *ennui* in such circumstances?"

"I suppose I could, as well as another woman, unless you mean to infer that your brother and his wife must be unhappy; I do not see that I should be more so than any other."

"You might, because you would have so much to renounce; whilst all these things would be natural, and therefore easy, to one brought up as I have been. You say you would like poverty, Dora; try. Allow yourself the gratification of no whim, deny yourself every superfluity which arrests your fancy, rise early, live plainly, do some useful work; for instance, make a flannel petticoat for a poor woman, or a cotton frock for a baby, and try for a month, or a fortnight even, how you like such a life. It would be sad to make a mistake, and find it out too late."

"But it would be quite different, Hilary, to

play at being poor by myself, or to be really so with Maurice."

"I admit that ; you could go back at any time to riches ; the step would not be inevitable."

"And so it would be unreal, and therefore could do no good. The motive would be wanting."

"I do not see that ; the motive would be to try whether you could manage without riches ; to understand yourself, and form a right judgment of the value you set on wealth. If you could not do without indulgence to this modified extent, and for so short a time, you would have no right to engage in such a situation for life."

"Besides," said Dora, "I do not believe it can be necessary ; for though Maurice is not rich, I should have my own fortune, which will, probably, be large. Papa told me he would give me handsome settlements if I married Mr. Ufford."

"And how much would he give you if you married Mr. Duncan ?" enquired Hilary significantly.

“ Oh, I don't know ! The same, I suppose ! why not ? ”

Hilary looked doubtful. Dora went on.

“ And then, after all, nobody in my station really is so poor ; it is all a romance of your imagination. I dare say Maurice would contrive as other people do, to get along and keep up a respectable appearance. I need not have had servants, I would hire good ones ; and I would manage my ménage so that it should be no trouble, and I should rather like the pleasure of ordering dinner, and contriving nice little surprises for him in the way of eating. I am sure I could be happy.”

“ Of one thing, Dora, we are quite sure ; without your father's consent, you will never try the experiment ; and if he wishes you to marry Mr. Ufford, he is not likely to approve of your engaging yourself to Maurice.”

“ You dreadfully matter-of-fact girl ! how you knock down all my delightful castles. Oh ! Hilary, I wish you had been crossed in love, and then you would have had some pity for me.”

And so the discussion ended. Hilary had not learnt as yet, that to contradict a youthful passion, to argue against it, to overwhelm it with unanswerable reasons, and endeavour to extinguish it with detailed proofs of its absurdity or unfitness, is certain to strengthen and increase its power ; (so red-hot iron is hardened into tempered steel by plunging it suddenly into cold water.)

CHAPTER VIII.

“ In the woods, where the gleams play
On the grass under the trees,
Passing the long summer’s day
Idly as a mossy stone
In the forest depths.”

TRISTRAM AND ISEULT.

TIME passed on, as time will do. Eighteen more months went by; Hilary hardly knew whether to say they went fast or slowly. Fast, very fast, it seemed, when she thought of the changes it had brought. It was only two years since they had first seen Mr. Farrington, and Sybil was now his wife. The child had grown up, and loved, and married, and left her father’s house; and yet how short a time it seemed

since she was yet a child, dependent on Hilary's care. Now she was in another home, the centre of her own system. She was very happy ; so, though her absence caused a gap, it was not to be lamented. Very fast too, time seemed to move with her father ; how rapidly he had aged, how infirm he had grown in these two years. It saddened Hilary's heart to look at him ; he had always been old for his age, he might have been eighty in appearance now ; and fear whispered to the daughter, that she could not, must not, hope for lengthened days for him. She dared not look forward, so she turned away her eyes.

But slowly, slowly it seemed to move, the time which was to bring her lover home. Two years of his absence had gone, perhaps more than another might have to pass ere his return. She began now to understand what was meant by hope deferred ; she knew what waiting was now. Now and then her bright hopes seemed to fail her, and she was ready to murmur that he

should still delay. But better feelings usually prevailed ; he was doing his duty ; he was acting right ; he was denying his strongest inclinations, and should *she* give way, she who had neither storm, nor danger, nor anxious responsibility, nor thwarting cares nor vexatious counteractions, nor any other difficulty to contend with ? She could stay with those she loved in her sheltered home, and pray for him in the parish church, knowing so little trouble, feeling no doubt of her duty. Shame on her false heart, her feeble trust, her fainting patience, if they failed her at such a time.

The other changes besides those mentioned were slight. The Paines indeed had gone, and Mr. Ufford now filled the office of curate. He had much more absolute power than Mr. Paine had exercised. Mr. Duncan was incapable of doing much, so Mr. Ufford ruled supreme, and, except that he had contrived to offend many of the farmers' wives, and quarrel with their husbands, had driven away the old schoolmis-

tress, and considerably diminished the school, had scattered the congregation and half emptied the church, everything might be considered to do very well. Hilary saw much of this with sorrow, Gwyneth with wondering indignation ; not at the clergyman, however, but at the people who disagreed with him. What any one could find to quarrel with in him, she could not imagine. So good, so quiet, so full of plans for the good of every one ; it was wonderful that every one would not submit to be led as she was, and would not on every occasion give up will, wish, and reason to the control of Mr. Ufford.

She could not understand why, but certainly Mr. Ufford had an unfortunate faculty, both for giving and taking offence, for finding himself injured, and feeling himself neglected, which did not smooth his way in the parish. It is foreign to my story, to relate how he quarrelled with the village choir about the Psalms, and the churchwardens about the poor-box ; how pews became a lively subject of discussion, and churchings a

source of dissent. He had Mr. Duncan's ear, and could persuade him to what he pleased ; and he was so plausible in his statements, so well-intentioned in his theories, that, of course, it was impossible he should contradict him.

Nothing could exceed the almost paternal kindness with which he had been welcomed and treated by the vicar ; and Hilary, conscious that her engagement was known to him, fearing no evil, and thinking no harm, had received him nearly as a brother, and done every thing she could to smooth his way with the people. Such influence as he had, he owed to the Duncans.

As to Gwyneth, ever since their first interview, she had given him credit for every virtue under the sun, and invariably believed him to be perfectly right, let who would differ from or disagree with him. She was the confidante, consequently, of all his theories for the improvement of his people, of all his wishes that they were very different from what they were, and of all his doubts of ever making them any better.

His theories certainly were beautiful : it was unfortunate that they should be based on the most ideal foundations, and so be generally impracticable. It was unfortunate, too, that those changes which he did introduce did not work well. For instance, as I said before, his attempt to re-model the school ended in the secession of the schoolmistress ; but as his plans were never sufficiently fixed to be acted on, the new schoolmaster fell into his own ways, and the routine became rather more inefficient than before, whilst Mr. Ufford, in disgust, pretty well ceased to visit it.

And so it was in everything else : things did not suit his fancy, were imperfect, or inappropriate ; he made violent changes, was opposed, was determined, carried his point, made enemies, gradually grew indifferent, and gave up his object, contenting himself with strolling about the Vicarage garden, detailing impracticable schemes to Gwyneth, and drawing imaginary pictures of what might be.

He was one of those people who never have time for anything, and who, from want of *reality*, do nothing in the end, although avowedly always busy. What could be effected by others in his plans, was well done ; what depended on himself alone, was well talked of. Yet he was a great favourite with many, especially with recent acquaintance, and his friends always formed the highest estimate of his powers, and the liveliest expectations of their results.

Hilary was most anxious to think well of him. She discovered in time that he was expecting to succeed her father in the living ; and this created a strong source of interest in him, and a most ardent wish that he should prove all that he was supposed to be. She shut her eyes to his deficiencies, excused any mistakes or neglects, laboured to supply the care and zeal which were occasionally wanting, and to reconcile all apparent inconsistencies or short-comings. She had often hard work, and did sometimes feel as if she were endeavouring to make ropes of sand,

although she laid all the blame of failure on her own mal-adroitness and ignorance.

Left as Hilary was almost entirely to her own discretion, it was not surprising that she sometimes made mistakes of conduct, acting on an innocence and ignorance of the world beyond her own village, which made her singularly unsuspicious of evil, and blind to imprudence. It certainly was a mistake to allow such unlimited and unreserved intercourse between Mr. Ufford and her own family; or rather, perhaps, the mistake was in those who placed so young a man in a situation where such intercourse was unavoidable. She herself heartily wished he were married; she missed Mrs. Paine more every month of their separation, and especially after Sybil had left Hurstdene; for Gwyneth was so much more reserved and silent than her sister, besides being younger, that she could not entirely fill her place; and her feelings were so enthusiastic, and so little regulated by reason, when she did express them, that Hilary had some trouble in guiding her at all.

Of course, Miss Duncan's bright spot in the future was the return of the Pandanus ; for however unremitting and unreserved a correspondence might be, it was impossible for the letters of a lover in the West Indies to supply all the daily counsel, the prudence, and the judgment which she needed to guide her ; and what could possibly stand instead of the charm of his personal presence ?

Mr. Ufford's father had died about a year after that gentleman had settled at Hurstdene, and his elder brother, after some occasional and rather lengthy visits to the village, had just gone abroad, partly for his own health, which was precarious, still more for his daughter's, which was decidedly delicate. Their mother had died of consumption, the second son, too, had shared the same fate, and many people thought the present Lord Dunsmoor had inherited the same weakness. James Ufford appeared the most robust of the family, and there seemed considerable probability that the title would eventually devolve on him.

Not that this idea had ever occurred to the sisters at the Vicarage, who, from seeing him every day, observing his simple habits, and quiet, gentlemanlike indolence, quite forgot that he belonged by birth to another sphere than themselves, and might some day rise to a circle where they could not hope to reach.

Meanwhile the Barhams had been sometimes at the Abbey as usual, and sometimes absent for months. It was evident Lord Dunsmoor avoided them, and Dora, in confidence, told Hilary, she had let him know that her heart was engaged elsewhere. Charles Huyton, too, was often there. Hilary met him too often. He was a great friend of James Ufford's, and frequently at Primrose Bank; of course, Hilary could not prevent that: she could not help, either, falling in with him in her walks and visits, but it was always painful. He was ever the same. Humble, gentle, only begging for friendship, entreating for tolerance, pleading for simple intercourse, if she remonstrated at these meet-

ings ; if she took them quietly, and tried to treat them as things of no consequence, he would use the opportunity to say or do something to oblige her. Papers which contained any intelligence of the Pandanus were always forwarded to her, and she knew the hand which directed them : news was obtained through the Admiralty of every change in the vessel's destination, and transmitted through James Ufford for her information. It was impossible to show more disinterested desire to please her ; more anxious concern to win her confidence, and prove himself her friend. It was hard to repulse his attentions, and to seem unjustly suspicious ; yet she could not trust him, she feared him too much, to be at ease—she was never sure of his sincerity.

Victoria Fielding had not since been seen in the neighbourhood ; she had married and settled in Cheshire, as had been intended. Charles often went there to visit her, and messages of friendship from her to Miss Duncan were not unfrequently the excuse for some interview.

It was summer again, and everything was sparkling in a brilliant morning sun. Miss Duncan was in the garden, before breakfast, cutting some flowers, stooping over a rose tree, to select the blossoms which could best be spared ; Gwyneth was making the tea in the parlour, whilst Nest was demurely talking to papa, occupied, meanwhile, in needle-work of the first importance.

“ Hilary !” said a voice beside her, which made her start. Down went the basket, the flowers, the scissors, all disregarded, forgotten ; she was in another moment gently, tenderly, clasped in Captain Hepburn’s arms. Surprise was swallowed up in delight, she could not even ask how he came ; she was so happy to see him there.

When the first excitement had passed away, and explanations were demanded, it appeared that the machinery of the Pandanus having been found defective, she had been ordered home to refit, and having arrived after an unusually rapid voyage, the Captain had obtained forty-eight

hours' leave, and travelled down in all haste to spend the time with his affianced, bringing the first news of his own arrival in England, as both he and Maurice, it appeared, had been too busy to write to announce it.

Maurice, too, was in England then ; he was well, but could not leave the ship for more than twenty-four hours, so for the present he must content himself with seeing Sybil in London. It was possible that the steamer might be paid off ; "and if so," said Captain Hepburn, "I should be free for the present ; perhaps it might be months before I should be employed again, perhaps years, and in that case, Hilary—" his eyes finished the sentence which his words left incomplete, as he stooped his head to take a view of the pretty blushing face, which was trying to conceal the feelings it could not suppress, and drooping so gracefully close beside him.

"You all seem very glad to have the captain with you again," said Mr. Ufford, laughingly

to Gwyneth, during his usual forenoon visit. Hilary was in the garden with her lover. "He is a great favourite, apparently. I affronted Miss Nest just now grievously, by saying that I did not think him the nicest man in the world; not so pleasant, for instance, as Charles Huyton."

"Nest loves him dearly," replied Gwyneth, "and it is natural she should; for you know he saved her life in the water."

"If that sort of obligation were always productive of dear love," replied he, "my friend, Huyton, would occupy the place just now filled by Captain Hepburn there."

"Perhaps he might have, had he wished it," said Gwyneth, innocently. "But Hilary was not likely to bestow it even from gratitude, if he did not ask for it himself."

"*If!*" exclaimed Mr. Ufford, amazed. "Is it possible that you, Miss Gwyneth, can be ignorant of his wishes, and his disappointment? I thought those sort of triumphs were always

boasted of between young ladies with peculiar delight."

"I can imagine no delight in disappointing an amiable man, nor any triumph in pleasing a bad one," was Gwyneth's answer. "So in any case, there could be nothing to boast of."

"And did she never tell you?" added he, curiously looking at her.

"No! and if there was anything to tell, the same delicacy which prevented her naming it, must prevent me from discussing it. At the same time, I think it must long have ceased, if there ever was any attachment; Hilary has been engaged these two years, and Mr. Huyton, apparently, has attached himself to Miss Barham since that!"

"Miss Barham!" repeated Mr. Ufford, with a curl of his lip; but he did not finish the sentence.

The next morning, when Mr. Ufford, as usual, walked over to the Vicarage, he was accompanied by Charles Huyton himself. There

was a little embarrassment and hesitation in his manner as he presented himself, indicative, perhaps, of uncertainty as to his reception, but which was quite unusual with him. But with Captain Hepburn beside her, Hilary could venture to be frank and friendly; and the kindly inclination shown by this visit towards one who had been his rival, won him a smile and a gentle glance, such as he had not met for a long while. Charles came to congratulate them on the safe return of the *Pandanus* to England; to express his good wishes, and to shake hands with Captain Hepburn once more. So he said; and he did give a prolonged and friendly grasp to his rival's hand, such as no true English heart could give or receive if a shade of evil feeling remained behind. It seemed to speak of deep heart-felt congratulations, and an earnest, trusting commendation to his care, of the fair being whom they both had loved, and one had loved so hopelessly though truly. So Captain Hepburn interpreted the action, and gave him

credit for generosity and submission, and true nobleness of mind.

They were wandering about in the garden, when Captain Hepburn noticed some changes which had been made there. Hilary said they had been suggested by Mr. Ufford, and principally effected by Gwyneth, who had adopted the ideas; for herself, she liked the old way best.

“So do I, Miss Duncan,” said Charles, gravely. “The old garden had great charms for me; do you know, Captain Hepburn, I have only once been in this garden since you left England.”

“Indeed!” replied the sailor; “whose doing was that then?”

“It was this lady’s wish,” said Charles, “but I thought it hard. Will you not make interest with her, that I may not be excluded in future? Trust me a little.”

“I cannot interfere with Miss Duncan’s rules or regulations as to her visitors,” replied

Captain Hepburn, in a tone that might pass for jest or earnest. "If I had any power, I might exercise it in your favour: at present, you know, I am only a visitor myself, and can say nothing."

"Papa wants you, Hilary," said Nest, just then running up; and she, taking her little sister's hand, returned to the house, rather glad at that moment to escape.

The gentlemen remained together looking after her, as they stood under the old lime tree on the lawn.

Mr. Huyton was the first to speak.

"We have been rivals, Captain Hepburn, but we need not be enemies; I would gladly prove myself not only your friend, but the friend also of the woman whom I may not love."

His companion thanked him for his professions.

"Whilst you have been gone, it has been my wish still to watch over her happiness, and

to guard her in every way. She can tell you that from the day I learnt how your success had for ever deprived me of hope, I have never breathed a word, nor done a single action which has spoken of any sentiment of which you could disapprove."

"I have no doubt of it," replied Captain Hepburn, frankly ; "and allow me to thank you for your many acts of kindness. But you must also permit me to say, that it is for the sake of your own happiness alone, I can form any wishes regarding the extinction of your attachment to Miss Duncan. No doubt it is better for you that it should sink into friendly feeling ; otherwise your sentiments towards her, though they may interest, could not disturb me. Her manner of receiving them is all that concerns *me*, and that has my most entire approval !"

Charles Huyton coloured deeply, and bit his lip in silence.

"Excuse my frankness," continued the sailor, "I do not intend to hurt your feelings ; I only

want to assure you, that I entertain no jealousy or mistrust, and *can* feel none, whilst she continues what she is. But you must understand, that my confidence does not arise from your refraining to seek her love, but from her own rectitude and delicacy. Your honourable intentions I have no right to doubt ; but my happiness is not dependent on your honour, nor on that of any other man. If she could not guard her own, your forbearance and generosity would avail me little."

"Of course ! of course !" said Charles, eagerly, having recovered his composure and complexion ; "in her you must have perfect confidence ; I hope you may have the same in me. You may, perhaps, be leaving her again ; her father's health is failing fast ; in the event of his decease the daughters must leave their present home, and I shudder to think of the distress which will befall them. Give me permission at such a time, or in any other moment of trouble, to watch over them with a brother's

regard, and extend to them a brother's care. Let me plead your authority for interesting myself in their welfare, and doing whatever may be within my power to comfort and protect them."

"Thank you," said Captain Hepburn, quietly, in reply to Mr. Huyton's earnest enthusiasm. "I am obliged to acknowledge the same thing. Mr. Duncan's health is, I fear, failing rapidly; and sorrow is probably in store for them on that account. She will suffer greatly."

"And you will authorise me to do what I wish; the little that is in my power to protect or shield them in trouble, to comfort and befriend them?"

"You can hardly need my authority, Mr. Huyton, to enable you to act the part of a friend, so far as the usages of society allow. Beyond this, of course, you cannot wish to go. Where the world has placed its ban on incurring obligation, or accepting favours, there it is not only prudent but proper not to trespass."

“Oh, my dear sir, the usages of society are narrow and restricted ; the ban of the world is cold and cruel ; they are invented to excuse selfish indolence, and silence the claims of the helpless and dependant. I would wish to set these aside, and act on my own judgment, as true friendship and kindness may require, regardless of what others may think.”

“Excuse me, sir, but the injunction to ‘Provide things honest in the sight of all men,’ requires that friendship and kindness should regard what may be said of others. The usages of society are founded on a long experience of facts and results ; and though they may only aim at controlling appearances, they are not safely to be trampled on ; neither is the world in general so very strict in its requisitions as to make it too difficult to comply with them. Depend upon it, they are founded on right principles, although only in themselves the very shell of what is fair and good.”

“All I ask is to be trusted ; to act as the

adopted brother and sincere friend of Miss Duncan and her sisters, in case of trouble."

"So far as Miss Duncan herself will authorise you, I can make no objection, Mr. Huyton: but nominal adoption and confidential friendship between individuals situated as you are, are mere delusions, and have been most judiciously placed in the category of unsafe and unadvisable things, although they may not be actually considered incorrect."

"The fact is," said Charles, with a slightly bitter politeness, "you are afraid to trust me. Well, so be it. If your suspicions interfere to prevent Miss Duncan having a friend in need, I can at least assure you she shall have my best wishes; that is all I can give her."

Hilary returned at this juncture, and Mr. Huyton felt himself obliged to take leave, although it was evidently with reluctance that he went.

Fast flew the hours, bright and fast, which Captain Hepburn might spend at Hurstdene;

his professional duties too soon forced him away ; but he was leaving with the hopes of speedily returning, perhaps for a longer time, perhaps to remain entirely, so the separation could be bravely borne.

“ My dearest Hilary,” said he, the evening he was to start, for he saved time by travelling all night, “ do you know what you are doing by allowing that young man to be so constantly here ? ”

He looked towards James Ufford, who was loitering as usual on the lawn with Gwyneth and Nest.

“ No ! What ? ” was her answer.

“ Do you not see that Gwyneth has fallen in love with the curate ? ”

“ No,” said Hilary, colouring crimson ; “ has she ? ”

“ So it appears to me.”

“ Well, and what then ? How could I help it ? What must I do ? Why should it signify ? ”

“Signify ! do you think Mr. Ufford intended it ?”

“I do not know. I am sure Gwyneth has not such an idea in her head ; perhaps they are both unconscious ; but don't you like him ?”

“Not much. I do not think he is *real*. He should talk less, and act more. He may be half in love himself with Gwyneth ; but it is in that aimless, purposeless way, which will never grow to any good end. He likes to keep her to himself ; he likes to talk to her ; but whilst he can amuse himself as he does, enjoying her admiration and devotion, and feeling sure of her preference, he will not ever care to exert himself for more.”

“But what can I do ?” said Hilary, distressed.

“Now a clever, active, manœuvring mother might fix him directly. Any one, in fact, who would condescend to use the requisite arts and exertions. There is a tact in managing these affairs, which few girls possess. They are sin-

cere, ardent, yet shy, modest, undemonstrative ; they can do nothing but waste their own affections. It never succeeds with a character like Mr. Ufford's, compounded of much good, alloyed by selfish and self-indulgent vanity."

"But, Captain Hepburn, would you have me manœuvre to secure a wavering heart for my sister ? I cannot stoop to that."

"No, Hilary, I would not have you different from what you are : but I wish Mr. Ufford went farther off. I have no confidence in him. It is a pity that you admitted him to such constant intercourse."

"I am very sorry," said she, humbly ; "it was my imprudence. I did not know better. I am so ignorant ; but perhaps you do not understand Gwyneth aright. She is enthusiastic and ardent in her fancies, but they do not always endure. What could I do now to prevent an intercourse which has grown up so naturally out of our relative situations ?"

"That is exactly the question that I have

asked myself again and again, without seeming to be at all nearer finding an answer. I am afraid it is one of those imprudences which are irretrievable : which, in fact, are only proved to be so by the result. You know there are steps which once taken, cannot be retraced, and actions of which we cannot choose but bear the consequences. This is poor comfort for you, dear Hilary ; but do not distress yourself so, my love ; perhaps the effects on Gwyneth may not be evil. I may have imputed too much to her."

"She is so young," said Hilary ; "oh, I hope I have not helped to make her unhappy."

"Yes, she is very young ; young enough to recover from an infatuation of the kind, should she find her idol is only made of clay, and to be better and wiser for the experiment."

"And I do believe her admiration is the result of religious feeling ; she would think little of him if he were not our clergyman. It was that attracted her."

"Those two feelings are constantly acting and reacting on each other, in rather a con-

fusing way in women. Personal regard for the minister is either the origin or the result of attention to his doctrines ; and one is constantly increased by the other."

"It seems so natural, so unavoidable, to care for the one who teaches us our highest duties ; instructs us in our dearest interests," interposed she, apologetically.

"Yes, it is essentially the nature of woman's religion, to seek to expand itself, pour itself out on some visible object. Hence has sprung the influence which, in every system, the clergy attained over the female world. It matters little whether it is the priest in the confessional, or the presbyterian minister in his congregation. The degree of power may differ occasionally, but its source is the same ; and where weak heads and lively feelings meet, the result is perpetually an effervescing enthusiasm, often troublesome and unsatisfactory at the time, and liable to wear itself out, leaving deadness and flatness behind it."

"You are hard upon us."

“Am I? I do not mean to be unjust: and though I admit there is a great deal of folly exhibited by those who are guilty of this idolatry, I respect it in comparison with what I feel towards those idols who consciously encourage the worship. I should not choose to express my opinion of those men, who, taking advantage of this feminine peculiarity, gratify their vanity, or indulge their love of excitement, by winning, under the cover of religious instruction, affections which they never intended to justify. My words would shock you!”

“Are such things done, out of books and plays? in real life?”

“Are they not? but you, dearest, can but little answer such a question: and the flagrant examples which come beneath one’s own knowledge, are not what one can quote or repeat. Suppose you were to call Gwyneth in at this moment. Can you not make an excuse for interrupting that eternal wandering under the trees?”

“Oh yes, I really want her, and I, too, am wasting my time here; there are some things to be looked out for Maurice, which you ought to have to pack up. Would you tell her, please?”

Accordingly, Gwyneth was summoned into the house, and Captain Hepburn joined the young clergyman on the lawn.

“How beautiful this place looks under a setting sun,” observed the former, gazing round.

“Yes—pretty well. I shall make a great change, though, if ever it is mine. Many of these trees must come down, and the flower-garden must be modernised; it is in wretched taste.”

“It seems to me to suit well with the house; are you a gardener?” inquired Captain Hepburn.

“Not personally in the least: but I like to have things nice, only somebody must do the work for me; I know nothing of details,” replied Mr. Ufford.

“I always think a practical knowledge and

love of gardening, give a certain reality and sincerity to a man's character, which is singularly useful: especially in your profession, Mr. Ufford."

"It would be a curious speculation," replied the other, "whether facts bear out your idea. I will take it into consideration, whether the best gardeners of my acquaintance are the best clergymen, and the most practical men. Would not a love of construction save a man's character? I have a great fancy for building, I own; and I expect some day to realise my plans on the Vicarage. That old house must come down. I could not live in it."

"I have received so much kindness here," replied his companion, "that I cannot contemplate such a change without regret. It is a comfort, however, to think that when an event so trying to the Vicar's daughters arrives, as that which will make you master here, they will have a friend, and not a stranger, to deal with."

"Poor things! I am really sorry for them,"

said the curate ; “ it will be a sad trouble. I think an Elizabethan house would look best here ; would suit the place and country. Don’t you ? ” eyeing the old Vicarage as he spoke, with an air of consideration.

“ I have not thought about it all,” replied Captain Hepburn, with internal disgust. “ I fear they will be sadly forlorn and unprotected ; their brother away, perhaps, and they so young and ignorant of the world.”

“ You are unnecessarily anxious about them, Captain Hepburn ; they will find friends, depend on it. I can understand your feelings of interest, however, although I can take more cheerful views of their prospects. Believe me, nothing on my part shall be wanting. I have strong motives to influence me—my sincere gratitude—remembrance of kindness received—regard, honour ; in short, make yourself easy. Their comfort and happiness shall be my first object. I pledge myself to that. Pray trust me ! ”

Roused out of his selfish dreams, Mr. Ufford spoke what he felt at the time, and meant all that he said. Captain Hepburn could understand his words and tones to have but one meaning ; his admiration for Gwyneth was sincere, and his purposes settled. If he had not the stedfast, straightforward strength of will, which the sailor possessed, he might yet have sufficient firmness of character to secure his own respectability, and Gwyneth's happiness. One must not quarrel with a man because he is more cautious in his movements, or more slow in his decision, than oneself. Captain Hepburn hoped the best from him, and whilst he trusted his warning to Hilary might not be useless, he flattered himself that his fears might be entirely unfounded.

“ I shall trust implicitly to such an assurance, satisfied that they will have a friend in you. They have their brother-in-law in London, to take care of them in case of need,” continued Captain Hepburn ; “ I have a great respect for

Mr. Farrington ; from what I have heard of him, he must be a very well-judging man."

"I must be going," said Mr. Ufford ; "if the young ladies are busy, I dare say they will not care to see me just now ; pray make my excuses to them. I wish you a good journey ;" and he went accordingly.

Two hours afterwards, Captain Hepburn was also on his road to London, speculating a little on whether he done more good than harm, by what he had ventured to say about Mr. Ufford. The first result of his observations was, that after a great deal of indecision, Hilary took courage to hint to Gwyneth, that now she had really grown up, and was neither in years nor person a child, she should be careful to behave as became a young woman, and that it might be as well, perhaps, to adopt a little more reserve towards Mr. Ufford, and not spend quite so much time in his society. Gwyneth heard her quietly, took in her meaning, and secretly deduced from it the assurance, that

Hilary probably thought the curate was falling in love with her, a notion which had not before crossed her mind. Hitherto her admiration had been, so far as she knew, purely of a spiritual nature; but this observation gave it another turn, and from considering Mr. Ufford in the light of a superior being, raised above human weaknesses, and only to be admired at a humble distance, she suddenly discovered that he was a gentleman, an unmarried man, and a young man, and one whose affections and future intentions might be subjects for speculation and doubt.

That he was heir-presumptive to a barony, and might look for rank and fortune in his wife, if he chose to have one, occurred to her at the same time with a sudden chill, which depressed her spirits to a painful extent; it was little likely that he would stoop to a portionless and undistinguished girl like herself; unless—and the thought gave her peculiar pleasure—he should really have fallen in love with her, as he told

her Mr. Huyton had done with Hilary. The contrast between herself and the clergyman, was not greater than between this other couple ; and if love had been so strong in one case, why not in another ?

So she reasoned with herself, and concealed her feelings, and resolved to wait and watch his conduct. Apparently, Mr. Ufford was anxious to justify his promises, and prove his friendship to the Vicar's daughters. His visits were for the next two days quite in the usual style, quietly walking in just when it suited him. Hilary, however, was more watchful, and allowed no more of those unrestricted rambles which had latterly been so greatly extended. Gwyneth had more occupation at home, and was obliged to be quiet and useful.

The third day brought an entirely new set of ideas. A letter came from Captain Hepburn, which was of some importance to their plans. The first page of this letter, though, no doubt, gratifying to the receiver, need not be tran-

scribed ; what relates to my narrative ran as follows :

“ The result of the survey is, that the boilers are found in a very bad state, and need so much repair, that in the mean time the whole ship’s company are to be turned over to the *Erratic*, a sister-ship, just getting ready for sea. This alters my plans, and puts an end to all hopes of a few months’ rest on shore. We shall probably be off again in less than a month, and for who knows how long ! no prospect of another leave, long enough to reach *Hurstdene* ; I could almost regret the change of ship, and do heartily wish she had not been in so advanced a state. However, it would be foolish, as well as wrong, to murmur at what most men would consider a singular piece of good fortune. But, my darling, shall I not see you again ? can you not all come to London ? We talked it all over, Sybil, Maurice, and I, yesterday, for I got your sister and her husband to come down and look at the steamer, and she is delighted at the plan. They

can take you *all* in she says, and she, of course, would be gratified by a visit from her father. It is almost your only chance now of seeing Maurice. Do arrange and come immediately."

There was a letter from Sybil to the same effect, and a most pressing one from Maurice, urging the proposal most warmly.

There was no room for hesitation, and no time for delay. Arrangements were made in haste, and the evening of the next day saw the family domiciled for the present at Mr. Farrington's.

Maurice was there to receive them ; the Captain had sacrificed his own pleasure, and allowed the leave to his first lieutenant, which they could not both have at once.

It is not my intention to narrate minutely all the events which occurred in London ; the interviews between the lovers, the excursions to Woolwich, to inspect the Erratic, and many other particulars not directly bearing on the result to Hilary. Days passed rapidly, and ex-

cept for the parting in prospect, would have been very happy. There was a charming uncertainty about the chances of meeting, which increased the pleasure ; and besides, there was enough of novelty in the great change to three girls from the forest, to excite and interest them.

Mr. Duncan never would allow his inability to accompany them on many excursions, to interfere with their enjoyments ; he had his own share, he said, in the different accounts they brought back to him, and it would be a positive loss to him, if either of his daughters were to shut herself up on his account ; he had long ago learnt to read by himself, and although he had never attained the fluency and ease which some blind persons acquire, perhaps from beginning so late in life, he was yet independent in some respects, and able to occupy his lonely hours by the study now dearer to him than any other, the Book of Life, which had been his consolation and support in all his trials.

“Shall I, or my rival, have the pleasure of your society to-morrow?” said Hilary, laughingly, to her lover, one evening. His visits were generally made after the hours of work in the dockyard were over.

“Are you jealous of the wandering lady at Woolwich, Hilary?” was his answer.

“Perhaps I might be, if I did not know that, as you deserted her predecessor, and transferred your attentions to her, so you would be equally ready to forsake your present favourite on detecting some defect in her constitution or her powers.”

“A sad specimen of inconstancy,” said he, playfully.

“No, not inconstancy,” replied she, “because the feeling remains the same; it is devotion to your profession which actuates you, and the ship, though well-beloved for a time, is cared for only as an embodiment; a visible symbol of this feeling. It is your profession which is really my rival.”

“ You are wrong, love ; to which did I devote myself first ? ”

“ Ah ! you mean that I am the rival,” said she, looking up, with a smile.

“ My profession is my duty, Hilary,” said he, gravely ; “ would you rival that ? I hope not.”

“ Never ! ” was her energetic answer. “ And yet, am I only your plaything ? ” it was spoken with hesitation.

“ That depends on yourself, Hilary ! ”

She looked as if to ask how ; but pondered in silence.

“ You may be, I trust you will be, my good angel ! my better self ! to inspirit, cheer, guide me in the path of honour ; not the weight to draw me back, the bait to allure me to forget the grand object of life.”

“ That is not professional honour ! ” said she, doubtingly.

“ No, it is to do my duty in the state of life to which it has pleased God to call me,” was

his quiet answer. "And, Hilary, professional honour is only dear to me, I trust, in so far as it may reflect light on a profession dearer still, that of a christian warrior."

"Ah ! I felt that was the foundation of your zeal."

"The only sure foundation, love ; the feeling, or rather the principle, which will carry one unflinchingly through danger, difficulty, trouble of every kind. Life to every one is full of deep mystic meaning ; the life of a sailor above all. The troubled waves, the wearying calm, the changeful winds, the uncertain currents, the dangerous rocks or shoals, the tedious length of voyage, the joyous arrival at home, all realities to us, are figures appropriated to mystic subjects. Then we have the lonely watch, the strict discipline, the hardships and self-denial, the temperance, the necessary obedience to superiors : ought not each one of these to remind the Christian of the duties of his calling ? each in itself a religious duty exemplified !"

“Like the chivalrous devoirs of the knightly warriors of old,” said Hilary; “an actual realisation in deed of the intangible theories of the Christian faith.”

“Yes! the whole of a sailor’s life is an allegory; an acted picture of things unseen. But that is not what I meant to speak of when alluding to a possible rivalry between duty and you. Hilary, whilst health and strength are granted to me, they must be at my country’s service when required; and no domestic tie, not even that of a wife, dear as it must be, may interfere. Not from the old heathen pride in patriotism which made one’s country’s glory the idol of life, but for the higher, holier reason, the belief that my path has been appointed by my Heavenly Father; and that to follow it with all my might, is but doing my duty in its simplest form. Do you not think me right? Life itself, were I called on to lay it down on service, would be gladly devoted; not to win the praise of men here, but to testify to the truth and sincerity of my profession!”

Hilary's eyes filled; and as she sat silently thinking on his words, almost unconsciously her fingers pressed the ring which he had placed there as a sign of their betrothal. He watched her countenance anxiously.

"You are not satisfied," continued he; "your look asks where you come in my estimation of life. Is not that it?"

"Am I selfish? I did think that."

"First of this world's objects; reward of labour and peril here in hours of rest; companion for ever in that life where duty will involve no sacrifice, and love will bring no pain or tears."

She could not answer, except by the quivering lip and drooping eyelid, which spoke of strong, but suppressed, emotion.

"I had not loved thee, dear, so much, loved I not honour more!" continued he, taking her hands in his, and speaking in a voice of ineffable tenderness.

"I believe it! I feel it!" she answered, eagerly. "I know that whilst Heaven has the

first place in your heart, I am sure of retaining my rightful portion there. I am not, indeed, I am not jealous of your devotion to what is so high and holy—only—”

“Only what?” inquired he, as she hesitated.

“Only I would rather you should serve your country, mankind, and above all, the cause of religion, by living, and not—” her words failed her again.

“To every man upon this earth, death cometh soon or late,” was his reply; “and, Hilary, ever since I can remember, it has been my dream, my wish, my hope, to devote my life,—I do not mean to *live*, but to *die*,—in some great, high, holy cause; something which may show that a Christian with the hope of salvation, and the promise of Heaven, is not afraid to do and dare all that a heathen warrior might have done with the poor promise of an earthly glory. But to no other ear than your own would I breathe this aspiration; who else would understand my feelings? In confiding

to you the deepest passion of my soul, Hilary, I prove to you how I have merged my life in yours. To ordinary companions, such thoughts do not find words to express them."

"They do better," said she, with a glowing cheek and sparkling eye; "they find actions. You have proved your sincerity again and again, in your dauntless defiance of danger. Yes, and I will not draw you back; woman though I am, I will not weaken you, nor bid you pause for my sake: rather let the thought of me nerve you in the hour of danger, make you stronger, braver, more intrepid in a worthy cause. And should your hope be fulfilled—ah! believe me, I will try to follow your example, and bear the agony for your sake, that you may wear a martyr's crown!"

"My own, true-hearted love!" was his only answer.

END OF VOL. II.

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